

## **Cotswold District Council Annual Report May 2023/May 2024**

District Councillors Michael Vann (Fairford North) and Tristan Wilkinson (Fairford South Kempford and Lechlade)

Michael Vann (LD) was elected to Cotswold District Council in May 2023 and Tristan Wilkinson (LD) was elected to the Council in a by election in December 2023.

First, we should like to thank Clare Muir for her hard work as a District Councillor for Fairford South between May and November 2023 when she resigned for health reasons.

A really important event in the year was the acceptance of the Fairford Neighbourhood Plan in the referendum held in May 2023 by an overwhelming majority of 90% of those who voted, the culmination of 10 years hard work by Fairford residents.

A major focus has been on sewage pollution and flooding. There have been meetings in the Community Centre of a multi-agency working group looking specifically at sewage and flooding issues in Fairford and the surrounding parishes, as well as extensive coverage of the issue by the BBC.

There has been much media focus on Local Government this year, with the financial pressures on councils across the country widely reported. Notably, some councils have had to essentially declare themselves bankrupt, whilst many are at risk of collapse without an injection of cash into the sector. The Local Government Association estimates that £4billion is needed over the next 2 years just to stay at a standstill position, with upper tier authorities with responsibility for Adults and Children's social care in particular danger.

Amongst all of the doom and gloom (and never ending rain!), however, there is plenty to celebrate, and we want to take this opportunity to highlight some of the great successes that hard working council officers continue to deliver despite the bleak picture. The public sector, and local government, in particular, is a fantastic place to see community focussed members and officers doing their best to deliver statutory services and go the extra mile to ensure that our district continues to thrive.

Within the ward CDC councillors have supported:

- Ongoing flood mitigation discussions with Thames Water, the Environment Agency and land owners
- The creation of a multi-use path linking Fairford, Welford and Lechlade
- The instillation of EV charging points
- The lobbying of Gloucestershire Country Council for road upgrades and repairs
- The Lakes by Yoo initiative to produce a regional flood and water management plan

Here are some highlights from across Cotswold District Council from the last year.

- CDC has been ranked as the 55th best performing local authority in England (out of 312), with our waste service and recycling rates of particular note.

-We have a new corporate plan which outlines four key areas of focus (Housing delivery, Economy, Climate and Communities) and providing statutory services to a good level.

-In sourcing of staff from Publica to begin in about October so we have more control of staffing and what they do, can make services more cost effective and better and make it more attractive to recruit.

- Funding for various projects agreed through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund, including:

- £400,000 for business grants for projects across the district.
- £100,000 allocated for village hall improvements. Several grants agreed already for projects including energy efficient lighting, a new kitchen and replacement windows.
- £75,000 for the Grace Network to bring the former House of Fraser in Cirencester back into use.
- Funding extended for another year for the Growth Hub, which enables them to operate an outreach service to cover the whole district.
- Various projects for Cotswolds Tourism, including an upgrade to their website.
- The inaugural Cotswold Homes and Interiors Festival which was held in Cirencester in March. It involved businesses in that sector from across the district.

Changing Places toilet facilities for the severely disabled delivered at Cotswold Farm Park, Cirencester Abbey Grounds, Birdland and soon to be Cotswold Country Park and Beach.

Other more general points to make, but which are broad indicators of the economy and issues where we have had influence include:

- Unemployment in Cotswold continues to be the lowest in the county.
- Town centres are performing relatively well with vacancy rates substantially lower than the national average.
- Broadband coverage is continuing to increase – 98.3% superfast, 65.1% full fibre.
- Royal Agricultural University Innovation Village planning application has been submitted.

Work is now underway at long -term derelict buildings in Dollar Street, Cirencester

- We have begun work on a new **Local Plan with** public consultation on initial ideas, updates on Policies and call for sites completed and **Design Code** public consultation completed in December.
- **Ecology.** Habitat Regulation document ensuring recreational impacts by new developments are mitigated in Zones of Influence (north Meadow and Cirencester Beech woods)
- Green Infrastructure strategy updated to ensure developments provide green open spaces and wildlife corridors.

- Systems set up to ensure that Biodiversity Net Gain can be delivered and monitored for the regulation 30 years after development.
  - **Cotswold Water Park.** 51 community bike stands have been installed throughout the District and within the CWP.
  - CWP Nature Recovery Plan, Collaborative work with Cotswold Lakes Trust and Somerford Keynes making wet wildlife corridors.
  - **ERS.** 165 licenced taxi and private hire drivers have completed Safeguarding training at CDC in how to safeguard children, young people and vulnerable adults and how to respond to evidence presented to them. Licenced drivers can be found on the website Public Contact List including wheel chair accessible vehicles.
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- **Fly tipping.** We have won a grant for continuing education on Duty of Care to prevent fly tipping. Working with neighbouring Districts, Highways and the Police we continue to hold Stop and Search to advise van drivers of the requirements for Waste Carrying licences.
  - **Building Control,** by 1<sup>st</sup> May 2024 to comply with new gov regulations following Grenfell Tower Fire all the team have had to take rigorous on line exams.
  - Building on the back of successful Crowdfund Cotswold campaigns from the skatepark in Fairford opened in August 2023 for which over £100,000 was raised to , Ampney Crucis Village Hall which raised over £30,000 toward solar panels. In total Crowdfund Cotswold has leveraged over £860,000 for projects across the District in the last 3 years.
  - The contract to run our three leisure centres and the Corinium Museum went to Freedom Leisure who took over on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2023. The new provider has listened to customers and each of the leisure centres has increased its membership over the last 12 months despite the changeover.
  - **Health and Wellbeing:** we successfully ran the Holiday Activity and Food Programme during the school holidays, piloted the first Mr Motivator fitness event at which 100 people participated and rolled out 'Fit Kits' at community events and to individuals in their own homes to promote easy fitness routines for people who may not usually have the opportunity to access this.
  - **Culture** - over the last year we have been preparing the launch of a new Cotswold District Culture Strategy - the first of its kind locally - which will happen this autumn. The aim is to link up and better promote the wonderful cultural offerings across the District to boost the economy, tourism and wellbeing.
  - Two events targeting the cost of living crisis were held in the North and South of the district. These were really well attended, identifying support for residents in the area, along with tasty food and entertainment for the children.
  - Cirencester Pantry continues to grow and thrive and has saved over 15 tonnes of food waste
  - Encouraging other community groups to set up pantries
  - We have recognised the need for satellite staff to work in Moreton to ensure residents in the north requiring benefit claims and job seekers don't have to travel to Cirencester to sign on
  - Encouraging social housing providers to not remove carpets when re-tenanting properties, helping to eliminate unnecessary waste and expense