

## District Councillor's Update for Blockley Parish Council, January 2025

Residents can contact me, Clare Turner, at [Clare.Turner@cotswold.gov.uk](mailto:Clare.Turner@cotswold.gov.uk)

### Privacy Statement

As a Councillor I may need to collect personal data to process constituents' requests for assistance or respond to their enquiries. As a Councillor I will only collect the personal data from constituents that is needed to provide them with relevant information, services or support. I will not give information about you to anyone else or use information about you for any other purpose, unless the law allows me to. Further privacy information see our Councillor Privacy Notice <https://www.cotswold.gov.uk/support/privacy-and-data/service-privacy-notice/councillors-privacy-notice/>

1. Changes to local government structure. The Government published their Devolution White Paper on 16/12/24. Whilst there is widespread support for devolution, the white paper represents a shift of power from central government to regional mayors rather than a shift of power to local communities. Unitary authorities will be formed in areas where there are currently two tiers of governance; it's a matter of "when" rather than "if". The probable outcome for us is that the county of Gloucestershire will form a new unitary authority (and 12 months later the six District Councils will cease to exist) and then that unitary authority will become part of a strategic area or combined authority with a mayor. There are still lots of unknowns in terms of exactly how the unitary will function and also the timescales involved but Gloucestershire County Council Cabinet believe there are advantages for Gloucestershire in moving quickly; the Government's paper outlines incentives for the first tranche of authorities to work through the process. As such, the Leader of GCC has written to the Government, requesting that the planned County Council elections in May 2025 are cancelled and instead elections would take place in 2026 for the newly created unitary. Our County Councillor Lynden Stowe is part of that cabinet and is best placed to answer any specific questions on those Cabinet aspirations. There is not universal agreement on the best way forward for Gloucestershire within the County Council and all but one of the District Councils have also written to the Government, to express their disagreement with the cabinet's position.

We should find out whether Gloucestershire will be included in the fast tracked authorities by the end of the month but whatever the pace of change, it's a big and complex undertaking that will be challenging to manage.

If anyone would like a long but comprehensive summary of the White Paper, there is a good factual briefing on the LGA's website here: <https://www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses/devolution-white-paper-day-factual-briefing#introduction>

It is possible that town and parish councils will end up taking on additional responsibilities as a consequence of the changes, but it remains to be seen how that would be funded or supported. The paper states "*The Government will also rewire the relationship between town and parish councils and principal Local Authorities, strengthening expectations on engagement and community voice.*" (Page 100).

2. Some community events, open to all, have been scheduled for the next few months and locally there will be events in Moreton (18<sup>th</sup> Feb), Chipping Campden (27<sup>th</sup> May) and Blockley (29<sup>th</sup> July). A promotional poster has been shared with clerk and you can find out more here: <https://news.cotswold.gov.uk/news/cotswold-district-council-announces-strengthening-communities-events-fun-connection-and-support-for-all-ages>. Councillors are welcome to

submit suggestions for suppliers to attend the Blockley date, which I will forward on. BPC may also like to consider ways in which we can support residents to attend e.g. booking the Hedgehog bus to bring residents from Aston Magna, Paxford and Draycott.

3. I was delighted to nominate the Blockley Community Speedwatch team for an Unsung Heroes award, which they have won. They will be presented with their award and recognised for their efforts at the full council meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2025. Anyone can nominate “Unsung Heroes” for recognition here: <https://www.cotswold.gov.uk/unsungheroes>. The press release for this month’s awards can be found here: <https://news.cotswold.gov.uk/news/celebrating-unsung-heroes-recognising-extraordinary-contributions-to-the-cotswold-community>
4. I attended a briefing about the Public consultation on the draft Strategic Investment Plan which is live from 20<sup>th</sup> December 2024 to 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2025.

The Western Gateway is one of seven sub-national transport bodies (STB) in England. Western Gateway STB work with nine constituent Local Authorities, including Gloucestershire, to take a strategic overview of transport, helping to champion and protect the region, prioritise strategic transport interventions, and work cooperatively beyond local boundaries on regional transport issues. Western Gateway’s Strategic Transport Plan is the link between national policy and local strategy. The plan focuses on strategic issues relevant to the region. It is supported by the Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) – the purpose is to achieve the aims and objectives of the adopted Strategic Transport Plan and to provide a list of prioritised investment proposals for the region.

Strategic Plan: <https://westerngatewaystb.org.uk/strategy/strategic-transport-plan/>  
Consultation <https://westerngatewaystb.org.uk/sip-consultation/>.

We are effectively in the very northeastern corner of the area covered so we are likely be impacted by the strategic plans of other areas too, to some extent. I am drafting a response expressing my concerns that there is insufficient investment in buses for rural areas and that investment should not underrepresent rural areas more generally.

5. At the Overview and Scrutiny meeting this month, we scrutinised the Council’s activities and progress relating to the Climate and Ecological emergencies. Understandably, the [report](#) presented to the committee focused on reducing carbon emissions and I asked officers for reassurance about the extent to which the council is also embedding mitigation of the impacts of climate change into their work, particularly where there are potential co-benefits e.g. ecological and economic benefits. For example, is sufficient resourcing being allocated to flood related issues, given CDC’s role in working with landowners on their riparian responsibilities? Are we doing enough to support communities with emergency planning for extreme weather events? Is there a role for CDC in helping build resilience in the farming community? Do we have enough officer time to fully consider opportunities for smaller investments now that could save a lot of money in the future? The response was that officers are working to embed this into all council activities and conversations have been happening in recent months to explore this across all council

areas. More resources would enable more to be achieved however so activity has to be prioritised.

A development with regards to climate action that might be of interest to residents, is that CDC (along with other local councils) have secured funding for a retrofit officer who is now in post. She is able to offer various free services within Cotswold District to help homeowners improve energy efficiency, including:

- Providing tailored advice on suitable energy efficiency measures and connecting homeowners with reputable, trained installers.
- Organising district-wide events, with the first being 'Drive and Thrive' in Cirencester town centre on March 6<sup>th</sup>, showcasing Electric Vehicles and home energy solutions. You can find more details at [www.cotswold.gov.uk/driveandthrive](http://www.cotswold.gov.uk/driveandthrive).
- Identifying and addressing barriers to retrofitting to help more residents benefit from energy efficiency improvements.
- Offering online masterclasses on topics such as retrofitting historic homes and heat pump installation, starting in February and taking place every four weeks.
- Providing free site visits to eligible homes for impartial guidance on energy efficiency. There is also a survey to understand residents' knowledge about retrofit and allow them to request a home visit. The survey and request for a home visit is available here: <https://forms.office.com/e/Mg1qCaUuEu>.

This scheme is available to homeowners in Cotswold District with an EPC rating of D or lower. Most of this work is targeted at the "able to pay" market but for low income households, there is comparable support and information available through Warm and Well schemes delivered by Severn Wye Energy in this area.

CDC and the other Gloucestershire District Councils are partnering with an energy efficiency organisation called Furbnow to deliver much of the support to residents and they have expertise in terms of working with heritage buildings and the newly recruited retrofit officer is working with the Conservation Officers in the planning team to provide up to date advice on retrofit for older buildings.

6. Drivers of electric vehicles will soon have greater choice about where to charge their cars as between now and March, twenty-four Electric Vehicle Charging Points (EVCPs) will be installed across Stow-on-the-Wold, Tetbury, Moreton-in-Marsh, and Cirencester at the following locations:
  - West street, Tetbury - 6 EVCP bays
  - Mangersbury Rd, Stow on the Wold - 4 EVCP bays
  - Old Market way, Moreton in Marsh - 4 EVCP bays
  - The Brewery car park, Cirencester - 10 EVCP bays

The chosen locations for the new charging points have been strategically selected to assist residents without off-street parking however, i.e. enabling them to charge their vehicles overnight so may be of limited use to residents of this parish.

Another welcome development for EV drivers or those considering EV is that just before Christmas, the Government published guidance on cross pavement cables. The guidance is to

make such cabling permitted development (i.e. removing the need for planning consent in most contexts). Some additional work is needed from County Council to create some kind of policy or guidance as to how cross-pavement cables should be installed locally and the CDC lead for Climate is working with GCC counterparts to try and resolve this for residents as soon as possible.

7. The Council has recently subscribed to a new tool known as the Low Income Family Tracker or “LIFT” which will help the Council better understand the challenges faced by low income families by using advanced data analytics to uncover hidden vulnerabilities and provide targeted interventions.

The LIFT platform compiles data from the Council’s existing records, such as housing benefit and council tax support claims, and cross-references it with publicly available information. It can track changes over time, identify risk factors, and provide a detailed picture of household needs across the district. This information will allow the Council to design effective campaigns and allocate resources where they are needed most.

Examples of targeted campaigns include:

- **Benefit Maximisation:** Helping eligible residents claim underclaimed benefits like Pension Credit.
- **Healthy Start:** Promoting uptake of this critical support for families with young children, which provides access to healthy food and essentials.
- **Free School Meals:** Encouraging families to apply, ensuring children receive at least one nutritious meal a day.
- **Income Deficit Support:** Providing support to families in financial difficulty, and promoting long-term stability.

8. At the November full council meeting, CDC voted to improve Council Tax support in 2025/2026 (by increasing the threshold by 4%) to support people on the lowest incomes in the district. The hardship fund is still operating for those in urgent need.
9. Full council meet again on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2025 and the agenda primarily covers uncontentious items around governance and renewing counter fraud collaborative agreements but the terms of reference for the Moreton working group are also being updated. The February meeting will consider the budget for the year ahead and a consultation is open for residents to share their views, until 28<sup>th</sup> January.