

# CLLR JULIA JUDD, COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCILLOR

## 2024 ANNUAL REPORT - ERMIN WARD

In May 2023 I was delighted to be re-elected as your District Councillor. I was humbled and thankful for an increased majority. It is an honour and a privilege to serve you for a second term.

### PLANNING

I strive for good planning decisions in our precious and sensitive area of the Cotswold National Landscape. Bad planning decisions cannot be 'undone'.

As part of the Levelling Up Act, Planning Fees are to be increased to assist Councils with respect to providing the Planning Service. This is to be welcomed and will assist in reducing the overall cost of delivering the planning service (planning fees only account for approximately 50% of the total cost of running the service).

The Fees for householder development will rise by 25% and all other application types will rise by 35%. The fees will be reviewed yearly and will be increased in line with inflation. Government has also removed the 'free go' provision for planning applications and has introduced a tighter planning guarantee which means that any applications over 16 weeks old with no extension of time agreed will be liable to a refund. Agents and applicants are now encouraged to use the pre-application service, which will ensure they get the valued advice they need to navigate the policies, but also the Council is compensated for the time and talent of officers for that advice.

Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and planning update. Planning Applications for new dwellings were being held up causing great problems for developers and builders. This was due to new legislation regarding Habitats Regulations, in particular at the Cotswold Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and North Meadow (and Clattinger Farm) Special Area of Conservation (SAC). This is a government safeguard, but there has been much frustration as applications could not be approved with mitigation schemes which were almost impossible to procure. This deadlock was resolved by the Council and its partners to be able to raise money (effectively an extra levy) from developers building new houses and holiday accommodation, to mitigate the impacts.

David Morren, the Interim Development Officer, did good work improving the function of the Planning Department. Sadly he has now left, but he has put some good processes in place which I hope will form the foundation for further improvements. He has been replaced by Adrian Harding.

The enforcement team continues to suffer from staff losses and non-recruitment. Unresolved breaches are an issue in so many of my parishes, it is a frustrating situation, please keep nudging me about them! They should not be allowed to be 'greyed out'.

From February to April last year, we had the the Planning Inspectorate inquiry into the application for major development in the Cotswold National Landscape (formerly AONB) for a HGV truck stop. This application was refused at Planning Committee in 2022 and the PINS decision, hoped for in mid-July, was eventually published in November marking the end of a long and hard fought campaign. I was hugely relieved when it was DISMISSED.

## ROADS

### A417 MISSING LINK

In January 2023 the Secretary of State approved the funding of the A417 Missing Link after years of planning and consultation. I am in regular contact with the A417 Missing Link team, including the Project Director, Steve Foxley, and I support communities with concerns which crop up as construction progresses.

There has been much frustration with road closures and long diversion routes, especially at night, however generally the worst incidents are caused by accidents on the A417, or minor road closures such as for ash tree die back work, and the subsequent rat running through our little villages, often causing log-jams on narrow lanes.

I continue to campaign for better signage, especially on and around the exits from the A417 to our pretty little villages, to deter HGVs from following SatNav or taking shortcuts on minor roads. I have a library of photos and video footage of enormous vehicles getting stuck in our tiny lanes, crashing through stone walls and causing havoc. It even caught the attention of ITV who ran a first item piece on it in May.

Roads are a County Council remit, however I will always assist you wherever I can with effective reporting and advice. Frustrations about repair of potholes and road repairs remain a constant issue with all Parishes.

## FLY TIPPING

Fly tipping continues to keep me busy, my Ermin Ward Facebook page is littered with incidents. I am delighted to report the CCTV cameras, which I campaigned for at Council in 2021, are now providing evidence resulting in many more prosecutions.

The £200,000 CDC Clean & Green programme has now run its course. Its effectiveness could not be monitored but thankfully we still have legendary ERS officer Kev Lea, who already does the work of two people..

I am delighted that CDC has accepted the proposal from the Government to increase the upper limits for various fixed penalty notices (FPNs). This means that within Cotswold District:

- The maximum fine for fly-tipping will increase from £400 to £1,000
- The maximum fine for litter or graffiti will increase from £150 to £500
- The maximum fine those who breach their household waste duty of care will increase from £400 to £600.

This is a step in the right direction, but why should tax payers contribute at all? Culprits should pay the whole cost of collection.

Don't forget I keep a ward supply of litter pick equipment, let me know if you need them.

## BARROW WAKE

I have to thank the Police for their unswerving support. In May they held a Police Intensification Day, which led onto Operation Hilltop, involving Solace in a concentrated approach to tackle the issues including the installation of police warning signs, CCTV and stop and 'talk'.

Furthermore, the Community Payback Team made a significant difference in the summer. They tidied up the grassland and tackled fly tipping in the private woodlands and on the approach road.

## FOOTPATHS

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/cotswoldwardens>

[centralworkparty@hotmail.com](mailto:centralworkparty@hotmail.com)

I frequently report footpaths blocked by fallen trees or overgrown with brambles. Cotswold Voluntary Wards (part of CNL) are pleased to receive such notifications, especially if they are accompanied with a map pin and photograph. I always receive a friendly message informing me when the route has been cleared. They have now invited me to be a Parish Warden.

## PUBLICA

Publica is a not-for-profit service delivery company incorporated in 2017, owned by four local councils (shareholders): Cheltenham Borough Council, Cotswold District Council, Forest of Dean District Council and West Oxfordshire District Council.

Politically, all four council administrations have changed since 2019 and they have collaborated to propose to move 95% of what Publica are currently providing, in-house. Only a few back office functions such as IT shall remain with Publica. The rationale is that services will be more agile.

The transition of services from Publica to Council will clearly have a material impact on the Council's resources and budget over the next two years. To fund the one-off costs of transition, it is recommended that £500,000 is set aside in the Corporate Priority: Publica Review reserve. Inevitably, there are likely to be workforce planning costs arising from the transfer of services. (from Feb 2024 Budget papers). See more about this below.

## OTHER MATTERS

### CDC LEISURE CENTRE

The leisure centre continues to be a huge drain on Council resources. A new service provider was approved in 2023 to include three leisure centres and the Corinium Museum & Resource Centre.

### SOLAR PANELS FITTED TO CDC OFFICES

I am delighted that at long last photovoltaic solar panels are to be installed at the CDC Cirencester council offices. Former Councillor and Leader, Tony Berry has been driving this since I was first elected in 2019. The new solar panels will contribute to environmental sustainability, they are expected to reduce the Council's CO2 emissions by approximately 43 tonnes each year, which is equivalent to the emissions from driving the average petrol powered car about 160,000 miles. The project is funded through the Cotswold Climate Investment, launched in 2022, which allowed residents and others to invest as little as £5 in local green initiatives.

### COTSWOLD PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY HAS BEEN SPLIT

North Cotswold will be joined by wards in Stroud and Tewkesbury including Minchinhampton and Painswick, also included are Chipping Campden, Stow-on-the-Wold, Northleach. Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown has been adopted as the Conservative candidate for the new North Cotswolds constituency.

South Cotswold includes Cirencester, Lechlade and Fairford along with their surrounding villages and merging with northern parts of the Wiltshire constituency.

Ermin Ward is in Cotswolds North.

I am delighted that BIRD LIP PC has been granted a £20,000 grant from the Safer Streets Fund issued by the Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner. I have been working with the Health & Wellbeing Supervisor at Cotswold District Council, the police and Birdlip PC since April 2023. The fund is to be used for crime prevention and potentially the installation of CCTV within the Parish with the hope of extending to Barrow Wake in the future. More details will follow a Parish Consultation.

## QUESTIONS & MOTIONS AT COUNCIL

I regularly submit motions and questions at Council. Members of the public are also encouraged to ask questions at Council meetings.

My motion to consider the provenance and supply chain for approval of bricks for building developments in the Cotswolds was supported unanimously. I propose that the Council encourages builders and developers to consider the use of ethical bricks for current and future developments within the district. BDA Brick Makers Quality Charter keep a register of approved, ethical brick suppliers.

I am pleased to report that the Employee Recognition Scheme which I proposed is now scheduled monthly. Anyone who runs a business will know that staff morale and productivity increases if people feel valued.

My Grey Water motion also received unanimous support. This requested that Council: Endorses the use of rainwater and grey water systems with a view to reaching water neutrality; request that officers investigate how rainwater and grey water systems can be promoted for use in developments and other properties in the wider district; request that the findings of these requests be delivered by officers through a briefing note to Members.

I was not able to support the CDC 2024 budget on 21 February 2024. Increase in car parking charges have been relentless. Last year saw the removal last year of Free after 3, which extended trading hours and especially helped the elderly and mothers on their way back from the school run. From 1 April it will cost £4.60 to park for three hours and since the Budget meeting this will include Sundays. This may not affect tourism, but inevitably it will deter local people from going into town, especially the elderly who find cashless payment confusing which in turn will inevitably be detrimental to businesses.

My work is only as good as how well-informed I am. Ermin Ward Parish Councillors and residents are invaluable in sharing views, local knowledge and keeping me abreast of issues. Thank you, your work is rarely appreciated for its true value but together we can make headway towards good governance of our beautiful district.

I look forward to seeing you all at your next PC meeting or AGM.

Julia

# CDC FINANCES

## BUDGET

CDC's Core Spending Power has once again increased this year by £639k or 5.4% from £11.8m to £12.4m. Core spending power measures the resources available to local authorities to fund service delivery and sets out the money that has been made available to local authorities through the local government finance settlement. It includes various revenue streams – including Council Tax, Government funding and grants and retained business rates.

Despite this increase in Core Spending Power, CDC faces external budget pressures that are impacting on its finances over the medium-term. There remains uncertainty around inflation and associated staff pay settlements, interest rates and energy costs.

A significant budget gap was noted in the budget outturn report last September which led the Leader of the Council having to raise concerns about the council going bankrupt if significant savings and cost increases were not achieved and a balanced budget delivered for 2024/25 financial year.

Cuts to visitor information centre funding, a reduction in the customer service phone answering times and the disbandment of the "Clean and Green" team are examples of the cuts delivered to attempt to deliver a balanced budget.

There has been significant increases in costs to residents from Council Tax and discretionary fees:-

- Council Tax by the maximum permissible level and will increase Cotswold District Council's Band D rate by £5 from £148.93 to £153.93.
- Garden Waste licence annual fee up £7 - £64 from 31 March 2024 (2023 - £47 to £57). An increase of 12% - bringing the tally over the last 5 years to 113% and collections halved.
- Car Parking Charges from 1 April 2024 - 15% increase in car park fees and Free Sunday parking scrapped.

The Chief Financial Officer stated in the budget papers that there is no immediate risk of Cotswold District Council having to consider issuing a section 114 notice, however the budget gap forecast over the medium-term must be closed to maintain financial sustainability.

Uncertainty around Local Government funding from the Government in the later years of the medium-term is a significant risk within the MTFS estimates. The implementation of Local Government Finance reform (formerly known as the Fair Funding Review and changes to the Retained Business Rates system) has already been delayed from the original implementation date of April 2020 until at least April 2025 if not later should a General Election take place in the latter half of 2024. The forecast impact on Shire District Councils is likely to be significant as resources are reallocated across Local Government recognising the Social Care cost and demand pressures.

## FORECAST SPENDING

The decision to withdraw from Publica is a vast unknown. The estimated cost has already increased by 150% since November 2023 and the budget now includes a reserve for the Publica transition of £500k. This amounts to nearly 80% of the council's increase in Core Spending Power for this coming financial year. There are concerns that costs are likely to escalate further as costs for external consultants, HR and Legal advice etc. Furthermore, we await clarity regarding the impact of the Staff Pension scheme to the council following this transition.

There are potential benefits to returning service provision “in-house” such as staff recruitment and retention and operational agility, however, these benefits need to be weighed up against the financial costs of both the withdrawal process and the ongoing financial impact once the transition has been completed both of which are currently unknown.

Other than the £500k “green bond”, CDC has historically been debt free. It is forecast that significant prudential borrowing of over £4m will be required in 2026/27 to deliver the planned capital programme.

COUNCIL SPENDING - CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2023/24 TO 2026/27 - click here:

[https://meetings.cotswold.gov.uk/documents/s6823/2023-24 Budget and MTFS Report - Annex D.pdf](https://meetings.cotswold.gov.uk/documents/s6823/2023-24%20Budget%20and%20MTFS%20Report%20-%20Annex%20D.pdf)