Kemble Ward Monthly Report - November 2026

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Here is my latest update, covering developments since my September report, with information current to 9 November. The main issues are the Local Plan consultation and the Government's revised position on Local Government Reorganisation, alongside local transport, my visit to Vertical Aerospace and recent climate and digital work.

1. Ward matters and local casework

Local Plan consultation and my representation

The Regulation 19 Local Plan consultation closed on 3 November, following an extension from the original 5 October deadline. The next stage is submission for independent examination. The Inspector will consider the plan's legal compliance, whether its proposals are justified and deliverable, and the representations made during consultation. Publication of the plan did not grant planning permission for the proposed developments.

My position remains clear: I believe the overall scale of development is too high, and 1,020 homes is far too much for Kemble. We need more homes, particularly affordable homes that meet local needs, but that does not make the proposed scale right. With around 80% of the district within the Cotswolds National Landscape, pressure is concentrated on a limited number of communities. CDC still has to justify the distribution it proposes, including why a smaller allocation at Kemble would not be appropriate.

The Council has now challenged the Government on four occasions: three letters, followed by a ministerial meeting on 19 October. Council Leader Mike Evemy met housing minister Baroness Taylor alongside South Cotswolds MP Dr Roz Savage. The Minister was not prepared to lower the target. She said the district's constraints could be considered at examination and agreed that housing growth must not get ahead of water infrastructure. That refusal is deeply disappointing, but it makes the quality of the evidence put before the Inspector particularly important.

My consultation letter, dated 1 November, asks for Kemble's housing capacity and pace of growth to be reconsidered. It also identifies practical gaps and questions that must be resolved before the plan is adopted:

- Kemble Station and village traffic: explain the modest forecast growth in station use against historic demand, thousands of additional homes across its catchment and the proposed additional hourly Birmingham to Swindon service. Test parking, access and peak traffic, including diversion through Ewen and Kemble when the main roads become congested, and safety on Windmill Road, Station Road and school approaches.
- Cirencester parking: quantify the additional parking demand through to 2043 after allowing for realistic improvements in buses, walking and cycling. The plan needs projected numbers and a credible response, even if detailed locations and designs follow later.
- Electricity capacity: obtain clear network-operator evidence on the capacity, reinforcement costs and connection times needed for homes, heat pumps, electric vehicles and employment growth. Existing constraints affecting airport businesses show why this needs to be resolved early.
- Cotswold Airport: resolve the operational, noise, safeguarding and public-safety questions with the airport and appropriate specialist advice. Consultation with the Civil Aviation Authority should not be presented as its endorsement of the allocation.

- Infrastructure and phasing: identify delivery bodies, costs, funding and enforceable triggers for roads, crossings, water, wastewater, drainage, schools, healthcare, electricity and green space. If the evidence cannot demonstrate acceptable impacts and timely infrastructure, the scale must change.

I still consider having an up-to-date Local Plan the least-worst option. Rejecting it would not remove the housing requirement, stop the land being promoted or prevent applications. With a housing land supply shortfall, CDC would remain exposed to speculative applications and appeals, with a serious risk of less coordinated development. Permission would not be automatic, and individual applications would still have to address their impacts. My judgement is that a robust plan offers a better basis for coordinating infrastructure, affordable housing and stronger environmental standards. That does not mean accepting the scale proposed for Kemble, and I take responsibility for both supporting publication and pressing for substantive changes.

CDC account of the ministerial meeting

Local Plan documents and examination updates

Road safety at Spratsgate Lane and Ewen Road crossroads

There have been further accidents at the crossroads of Spratsgate Lane and Ewen Road, including collisions resulting in hospital treatment. Although highways are Gloucestershire County Council's responsibility, I have been working with GCC's highways manager, our county councillor Lisa Spivey and Somerford Keynes Parish Council to press for further safety improvements.

This is personal for me: my own car was previously written off at this junction. I secured improvements to signs and road markings, along with hedge cutting, but the continued accidents show that more is needed. Thankfully, I am not aware of any fatalities, but the injuries and repeated collisions are serious cause for concern.

My research suggests that a significant issue may be gap perception: drivers see approaching vehicles but misjudge their speed and the time available to cross or pull out. A recent incident involving me reinforced that concern. I am asking Highways to investigate this explanation and identify measures that address it, alongside any other contributing factors.

I am putting forward a proposal and asking GCC Highways to develop a costed scheme for the parish council to consider. Somerford Keynes Parish Council has agreed in principle to contribute Community Infrastructure Levy funding towards additional works, subject to considering the scheme and its cost. With GCC's road safety budgets stretched, a jointly funded approach may help secure improvements sooner. No final scheme or funding amount has yet been agreed.

Kemble to Cirencester Greenway

I have prepared a letter of strong support for Walk Wheel Cycle Trust's latest Community Infrastructure Levy funding application for the Greenway. This builds on CDC's previous allocation of £180,301 for design and development and the work with Kemble and Ewen Parish Council, landowners and other partners.

The route would give residents a safer and more convenient option for walking, wheeling and cycling between Kemble, the station and Cirencester. It matters for existing communities whatever the eventual scale of Local Plan development. The latest funding application is a further step towards delivery; it should not be read as confirmation that construction funding has been awarded.

Visiting Vertical Aerospace at Kemble

I visited Vertical Aerospace at Cotswold Airport with Roz Savage MP and council colleagues. Seeing the electric aircraft up close, and trying the passenger cabin mock-up firmly on the ground, made something that had felt like science fiction seem much more real. It was encouraging to see this engineering happening in our own ward, with the potential to support skilled jobs and cleaner aviation.

I have created a short website with photographs, reflections and background on the technology, including Roz's video from the visit. I used ChatGPT to help turn my notes and photographs into the site, a practical example of producing something useful that I would otherwise have struggled to find time to create.

Photos and reflections from my Vertical Aerospace visit

2. Local Government Reorganisation

What the Government means by minded to

On 29 October, local government minister Jim McMahon announced that the Government is minded to proceed with one unitary council for Gloucestershire. July's decision has now been withdrawn. This is a fresh provisional preference, with further representations to be considered before a final decision, expected before Christmas. The ministerial letter provides for a representation period of at least three weeks, with exact dates to be confirmed.

"Minded to" has a practical meaning: one council is the Government's preferred outcome, but the decision remains open to change. Ministers could modify the proposal, choose another option or decide against proceeding. A final implementation decision would then require a structural changes order and Parliamentary approval. The letter itself creates no new council.

The revised election and handover timetable

CDC's published account gives the following timetable, with the new unitary stages conditional on the proposal being confirmed and legislated for:

- May 2027: elections to Cotswold District Council on existing boundaries.
- May 2028: elections to the new Gloucestershire unitary council, initially operating as a shadow authority to prepare for the transfer.
- April 2029: vesting, when the new council would take over county and district responsibilities and CDC would cease to operate as a separate council.

CDC and the County Council continue to provide their existing services during the transition. Parish and town councils would remain separate elected bodies. The revised timetable means that the councillors elected to CDC in 2027 would, under this proposal, have responsibility for the final two years before the handover.

Government letter setting out the provisional decision

CDC statement on the revised timetable

The regional question remains unresolved

There is still a separate decision about Gloucestershire's place in regional devolution. This concerns membership of a wider strategic or combined authority, rather than which unitary council Gloucestershire would join. The main possibilities under discussion are an enlarged West of England Combined Authority (WECA) and a Three Counties arrangement with Herefordshire and Worcestershire. Neither has been agreed for Gloucestershire.

Six of Gloucestershire's seven council leaders have renewed their request for a route into WECA, potentially beginning with a Gloucestershire Foundation Strategic Authority. Tewkesbury has kept both the northern and West of England options open. The 29 October announcement did not settle this question. It matters because regional arrangements could shape transport, infrastructure, skills and investment. I will continue to argue for a strong rural voice and meaningful parish and neighbourhood influence as the details develop.

Gloucestershire's renewed call for a South West devolution deal

3. CDC and portfolio work

Practical farming and environmental improvements

On 1 October I joined a Climate Leadership Gloucestershire visit to Gamage Hall Farm near Dymock. The farm demonstrated how better livestock records and feed management, solar generation, improved ventilation and careful manure storage can support animal welfare, farm viability and the environment together. Protecting the River Leadon and retaining nutrients on the farm were practical priorities.

The farmers and partners are also exploring shared energy and local food projects. Those ideas remain proposals, but the visit offered useful lessons for the Cotswolds: environmental improvements work best when they also reduce waste, protect water and soil, and support viable local businesses.

AI and council services

The October scrutiny report recorded further progress with CDC's AI work, including staff training, eleven AI Champions and a planning documentation pilot awaiting AI Board approval. As Cabinet Member, my priority is to turn that activity into evidence of better services and useful staff time savings, with proper checks on accuracy, privacy and cost. Officers and the Council remain accountable for decisions. The report did not yet quantify financial benefits, so it is too early to claim cash savings.

Solar installations and warmer rented homes

CDC's October update on Cotswold Home Solar reported 95 household installations through its partnership with MakeMyHouseGreen. The Council estimates combined annual energy-bill savings of around £115,000 and carbon savings of approximately 86 tonnes. These are estimated benefits across participating homes, rather than a guaranteed saving for every household.

Cotswold Home Solar results

Cabinet has also approved an updated Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy, reported on 2 November. It strengthens the Council's approach to unsafe housing, harassment and illegal eviction. Warmer, drier and more efficient rented homes matter for residents' health as well as their bills, and the policy gives officers a clearer basis for action when standards fall short.

4. CDC News

Recent November news of particular interest, published by 9 November:

Winter heating support for off-grid homes

CDC's 4 November reminder highlights grants of up to £9,000 for eligible oil- or LPG-heated homes switching to a heat pump, with the additional support available until March 2027. This is a timely winter reminder of the scheme covered in September. Warm and Well can provide free advice on suitability and available support.

Heat pump grants and free energy advice

Stronger protections for private renters

The 2 November announcement explains the updated enforcement policy and the Council's approach to improving conditions in privately rented homes.

Private rented housing enforcement update

Family cinema at the Corinium Museum

Festive Fun with Peppa screenings take place at the Corinium Museum on Saturday 21 November at 11 am and Sunday 22 November at 2 pm. Tickets are £5, with booking through the museum.

Corinium Museum November family screenings

As always, if there are local issues you would like to raise, please do get in touch.