

THE GOLDEN VALLEY DEVELOPMENT

Golden Valley Development FAQs

About Golden Valley Development

What is Golden Valley Development?

The Golden Valley Development will create a vibrant pioneering Garden Community integrating hi-tech business, residential and leisure uses. At its heart will be Cyber Central: the UK home of cyber, digital and creative sectors arising from Cheltenham's international reputation for leadership in cyber innovation. With a significant development site adjacent to GCHQ in a highly accessible location with great connectivity, the opportunity exists to create a destination of global significance. It will require the highest standards of environmental sustainability integrating exemplar homes as part of a thriving and inclusive campus and garden community, defined by its quality in design, public spaces and approach to connectivity both digitally and physically.

What is the difference between the Golden Valley and Cyber Central?

Cyber Central will be the commercial and innovative heart of the wider Golden Valley Development and will be home of cyber, digital and the creative sectors. It will be more campus than business park and this innovative heart will be developed along with new private and affordable homes creating a vibrant community supported by shops, restaurants, leisure and open recreational space. It will greatly enhance Cheltenham's appeal as a destination for living and working.

What have you been doing since the project was first announced?

Since March 2020, we have been carrying out a staged procurement exercise to identify a suitable development partner to drive the development forward for us and make the vision a reality.

Developer selection

Why was this developer chosen over the others?

The developer was chosen following the competitive procurement process, where suitably experienced developers and innovation operators were invited to submit proposals in line with the vision for Golden Valley that would deliver the Council's wider objectives and aspirations. The preferred developer, HBD X Factory, scored the highest in this competition demonstrating they have the experience and ability to deliver the Council's objectives and aspirations.

What are the main features of their proposal?

The main feature of their proposal will be the creation of the Cyber Central Innovation Zone to capture creativity of the cyber sector, generating and nurturing pioneering thinking and interactions from the brightest minds across the sector from start-ups to large global corporates and the public sector. The scheme will look to set new standards from both a commercial and residential perspective, but concentrating on creating this inclusive campus environment.

What disruption will there be?

The Golden Valley Development will be delivered in phases over a long period of time. Construction work will be ongoing over an extended period – however disruption to existing communities will be kept to a minimum. There will be delivery and general construction traffic and people working to deliver the project. This should create employment and business opportunities for the local and wider community. We will work with the contractors building on site to minimize disruption to the lives of the local community.

Will the construction traffic clog up our roads?

We will work with the contractors building on site to minimize disruption to the lives of the local community through the planning and construction phases of the development. The current WCTIS improvement works currently being undertaken to the surrounding network will improve the flow of traffic and increase capacity.

What traffic routes will the developer use?

Traffic routes will be considered and determined through the planning process leading up to the start on site.

What will we see?

Following the selection of the preferred developer, we will be working with them to confirm the details of the first phase of the development. This will lead to first planning application, which will hopefully be submitted in 2022.

When will the building work start?

Building work will start when planning permission has been granted and contractors are appointed. We are aiming for building work to start in 2023.

Do we get a say in the proposal and the design?

Yes. There will be a programme of public engagement events leading up to the submission of the first planning application.

What local employment will there be for us?

The Golden Valley Development is aiming to create up to 12,000 jobs in construction and for companies based in the completed buildings. It is intended that the neighbouring communities as well as wider Cheltenham and Gloucestershire will benefit from this job creation.

Business in town

Is there a need for this kind of employment allocation when there is empty office space in town?

While there is a small amount of vacant space in town, there is nothing of the scale and quality we are proposing for Golden Valley Development, based on the current demand and the future potential.

Will the new start-ups in town be pushed out as tech giants move into the larger spaces?

If anything, the opposite is more likely. As start-ups grow and need more space, Golden Valley will give them that, as well as innovation and networking opportunities, making Cheltenham the ideal place for start-ups to both emerge and grow.

Won't it take businesses away from the centre of Cheltenham?

We see the town centre locations such as the new Minster Xchange and Hub8, as attractive alternatives, complementary to Golden Valley, and supporting a network of businesses as they grow. The town centre location also suits freelancers and consultants or larger companies looking for short-term project space. This is part of a growing and thriving eco-system in and round Cheltenham and Gloucestershire.

Local challenge**Why did the council buy the land?**

This is a very important project for Cheltenham, and for Gloucestershire, so the council wants to make sure it is developed with the best interests of the area at its heart.

Being a landowner allows the council to have more influence over how the land is developed, with the highest aspirations for the site in mind.

Who did the council buy the land from?

The land was bought from private landowners.

How much did the land cost?

The total cost of the acquisition was £37.5m. The land has already been the subject of transport and ecological studies, which will form part of future planning applications.

Why are you planning to build on greenfield land?

We know this area will be built on so it is our job to make sure we get the best possible outcome from it.

The land was removed from the green belt as part of the Joint Core Strategy (JCS), which was adopted in 2017, when the area was designated for development. Its location on the outskirts of Cheltenham makes it ideal for Golden Valley, the home of Cyber Central UK, which is a hugely important project for the local economy.

There is not enough brownfield land available for the scale of housing and employment sites we need over the next 10 to 15 years in Gloucestershire, where less than 2% of the total land area is currently developed.

Is there a conflict of interest with the council being both the landowner and planning authority?

No, it is quite common for local authorities to be both the planning authority and lead developer and there are special processes in place to make sure there is no conflict of interest.

Any development is still subject to the planning rules and policies and to approval by the planning committee in the same way as any other application.

How do you know it's viable?

The whole county is behind this project, we know there's a thriving cyber sector already in Cheltenham and we know what's needed to help it grow. The unique combination of research and

development alongside businesses will give enterprise the best chances of success. This is a major development and overall the project will cost in the hundreds of millions of pounds, representing a massive investment in Cheltenham.

Cheltenham Borough Council has covered the purchase of this land and the majority of the project costs with further contributions from GFirst LEP and Homes England to support the infrastructure improvement work needed in the area – including a planned upgraded junction onto the M5 which Gloucestershire County Council submitted a bid for in Spring 2019 fully supported by CBC, TBC and GFirst LEP. Tewkesbury Borough Council and Gloucestershire County Council have also provided much need support for the project delivery.

Further long-term development will bring more investment from other areas, including private business. Councillors recognised that this was a huge opportunity and that the biggest risk was not taking a controlling interest in order to ensure we develop the site as originally proposed.

The due diligence that was undertaken for the purchase decision was based on commercial rates of interest for capital and on independently assessed land values.

You say you want to create a magnet for young people, what about the young people who are already in the county?

Becoming a magnet county isn't just about attracting talented young people from further afield. Most of all it's about growing our own and creating opportunities so they can stay and grow in Gloucestershire if they choose to.

We see this development as one that will create new opportunities for young people in Cheltenham, across Gloucestershire, and beyond.

Why only cyber?

Cyber is a particular strength for Cheltenham and an area where we are already an attractive location for the industry. It is a case of building on those existing strengths. Our focus is on creating space that will encourage that, though the exact mix of businesses is hard to predict at this stage. It will almost certainly span beyond just cyber and include a wide range of digital and creative activities.

There will be opportunities for other businesses, including food and beverage and leisure outlets, local retail and support services (e.g. legal, finance, etc.) as part of the scheme.

How is a business defined as cyber?

Cyber is a term used to describe all kinds of digital innovation. This includes cyber security, where Cheltenham already has a particular strength, as well as associated technological and creative services.

Why do you think it will make any difference to someone who currently lives near the proposed development?

As the site develops over the coming years it has the potential to provide thousands of jobs, both in the initial construction phases and then in the businesses that will occupy the site.

It will create accessible green spaces that the community can use for leisure, as well as supporting wildlife. The further development will significantly increase the availability of affordable housing locally.

Is the borough council making money out of it?

In the long term, we do expect to see a return on our investment, which will go back into providing services locally and improving life in Cheltenham. Our commitment is to ensure that Cheltenham is a place where everyone thrives supported by a thriving economy, a thriving cultural offering and thriving communities, and we want all our communities to benefit and prosper from the investments we make. The council is able to access funds at good rates, which allow us to invest with that social purpose as well as expecting long-term income to reinvest in the town.

Will this expose Cheltenham and its residents to a higher threat of terrorism? What preparations are in place for that?

GCHQ has been in Cheltenham since 2004 and is one of the most high-profile government sites in Britain – as such there are well established security plans in place which draw on local and national resources should they be needed. Local partners, including the police and fire service, work closely with GCHQ and the government to make sure that regular testing of the plans takes place.

Will it affect the value of my house if I live in the area?

It is hard to predict how housing prices will be affected but it's anticipated that the proximity to desirable employment and leisure spaces will improve demand for local housing.

What about junction 10 of the M5?

Upgrading M5 junction 10 is a key part of improving access to this area of Cheltenham. GCC, with the full support of CBC, TBC and GFirst LEP, made a bid to Homes England to fund the upgrade of J10 which was successful in March 2020.

The £249m award will be used to improve access to and from the motorway northbound and southbound to a new link road into Cheltenham along with a package of other network and transport improvements. This will support growth plans both locally and throughout Gloucestershire, as well as help to solve long-standing traffic and travel issues, helping to keep our county moving.

Where will people park?

There will be parking available on site and a strong focus on promoting and enabling more sustainable and active travel options (walking, cycling and public transport).

How will you reduce flood risk?

The area is not identified as being at risk of flooding in the county council's Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, however all necessary surveys will be carried out on the land before any construction begins. We plan to use some of the existing watercourses to enhance the site environment.

What about the natural habitats?

We're keen to protect our local wildlife and as part of the work already completed, ecological surveys have been undertaken. That means that important natural habitats on site are identified and either protected or provisions made to safely relocate them to alternative sites.

We plan to develop the site in accordance with the "Building with Nature" standard and the fact that the site has been awarded Garden Community status means that we will be able to draw on additional resources from government. The extra support will allow us to deliver environmental gains; supporting wildlife and biodiversity.

About the development

Will there be affordable housing as part of the development?

Yes, this would be a strategic site in terms of planning policies, which requires a minimum of 35% affordable housing provision.

Will housing be for anyone, or only those involved in the cyber industry?

Housing is something that is high on the agenda for local councils and partners. We're looking at meeting the genuine local need, as well as anticipating people moving to the area for work.

Practicalities and connections

Will there be roadworks?

Yes, but disruption will be kept to a minimum and residents will be notified in advance.

Is it something to do with the JCS?

Yes, the allocated land is referred to as A7 in the JCS and it is a critical part of delivering the necessary housing and employment land both Cheltenham and Tewkesbury need to support the expected demand in the next 10-15 years.

Is it something to do with Gloucestershire College's cyber academy?

The Cyber Academy is a very pro-active response by Gloucestershire College to the demand that already exists for cyber skills in the county and will continue to grow in the future. The college is well placed to connect with organisations in the Golden Valley in the future.

Is it something to do with the Local Industrial Strategy for Gloucestershire?

Yes, the project builds on the strength of the cyber sector in Gloucestershire, and it is the sector the government is most interested in supporting in our county.

What is a garden community?

Garden communities are a government initiative which seeks a “vibrant, mixed-use, communities where people can live, work, and play for generations to come – communities which view themselves as the conservation areas of the future”.

Is there an example of this kind of development succeeding elsewhere in the country?

This is a truly pioneering development, but there are some similar examples in the UK of sites that have successfully incorporated businesses, academia, leisure and housing. For example, Manchester Science Park, Harwell Park and Plexal all have some comparable aspects.