

Stroud District Councillors' Report – December 2023

Report of meetings during November 2023

All Stroud District Council and Committee papers can be found here:

<https://www.stroud.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/meetings>

Recordings of meetings are available via the Council's You Tube channel (Live recordings):

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCeH_AmF0s-TShcYIM8Stweg

Development Control Committee – 14 November

- Land Known as Verney Fields, Bramble Lane, Stonehouse, Gloucestershire S.23/2113/NEWTPO New TPO/0586 – Tree Protection Order Confirmed.
- The Manse, Alkerton, Eastington, Stonehouse S.23/1688/HHOLD
Erection of a garage with home office and driveway extension. Resubmission of S.22/0321/HHOLD. Refused.

Strategy & Resources Committee – 23 November

Kingshill House Dursley

Approval was given for Stroud DC to enter into a new lease with Kingshill House Ltd for 7 years for their continued use of this Georgian Grade II* listed mansion, to provide a valued programme of cultural, artistic and community activities and events.

Economic Development priority updates

Progress was noted on the economic development priorities in the Council Plan. This covered improving business services, digital and online support, the Shop Local campaign, keeping wealth in the district, skills and training, and growing the visitor economy (including engagement with Visit England and Visit Britain, and reviewing how filming permissions are managed).

Market Towns Vitality Funding

Agreement to support the development of proposals for a Market Town Vitality Fund, to be presented in February 2024. This is work in progress, and there will be engagement with the market towns before the fund is finalised. The Committee paper says:

With the ongoing transition of high streets nationally from retail to experience destinations, there is the need to support our district's Market Towns. Combined with the growing concern as businesses leave the high streets due to factors such as inflation, high energy costs, wider cost of living pressures, and the continued growth of online retail provision, it is important to continue developing our work with our town and parish council partners and other key stakeholders, to ensure that we are doing all we can to promote thriving market towns for our residents, businesses and visitors.

National data identifies that high street closures peaked in 2022 and figures for 2023 are expected to be similar, with retail, restaurants, department stores, bank branches and coffee shops shutting for good.

Our Council Plan outlines our commitment to support high street businesses in the area, to deliver local incentives to increase footfall, and to grow a sustainable visitor economy, including the night-time economy. Similarly, the Economic Development Strategy prioritises boosting our market towns and rural vitality. To

deliver against these priorities, and to respond to the challenge of empty shops given the decline of retail in many places, we are proposing to introduce a Market Town Vitality Fund aimed at supporting the vitality of our market towns during the ongoing challenging economic climate.

The Committee is asked to support further engagement with our Market Towns and other partners about their priorities for high streets in Stroud district, to help shape the design and operation of the funding. The scale of funding will not be confirmed until we have received confirmation of the Local Government funding settlement, which is expected in late December 2023. Detailed proposals about the fund will also be subject to review by our Finance Team and One Legal to ensure compliance with all statutory provisions and a further report will be presented to this Committee with the budget in February 2024.

Community Funding (Crowdfunding)

Committee agreed to purchase a new Community Funding platform, and to allocate £100,000 to match fund successful community-led campaigns. The new supplier will also provide support to organisations to set and reach their funding target. Further details of the scheme will be shared in March 2024.

SDC website improvements

Update on upgrades to the council's main website and the development of the website strategy to improve customer experience, and on the work to strengthen the Council's customer contact centre.

Extension of Berkeley Car Park

At the request of Berkeley Town Council, the Committee agreed to purchase a garage site (owned by the Stroud DC Housing Revenue Account) to extend the existing 24-space Marybrook Street car park in the town. The total project cost will be £145,000, with between £25k and £45k to be contributed by the Town Council.

Procurement Strategy and Social Value Update

The new strategy for 2023 -2028 was approved. For Social Value, since the last annual update, seven tenders more than £75,000 have gone through the Social Value Portal. As a result £3.29 million has been committed in Local Economic Value and over £121,000 in social value.

- Local Economic Value is defined as the monetised value of local jobs and local spending resulting in additional economic value locally.
- Social Value is defined as the monetised value of additional benefits created for communities and society directly.

Member / Officer Reports shared for information:

- Performance Management
- Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee (GEGSC)
- Regeneration and Investment Board
- Canal Update

Community Services & Licensing Committee – 30th November

Financial reports - for Quarter 2 and Committee Revenue Estimates for 2023/24 and 2024/25

Committee discussed the 2023/24 forecast outturn position against the revenue budgets and Capital Programme that the Committee is responsible for, in order to give an expectation of possible variances against budget.

Member/Officer reports were shared for information: on Citizens Advice, Cost of Living, the Leisure Service, and the Cultural Strategy.

Local Plan Review

Stroud District Council is working with local partners to provide information to the Planning Inspectors, for the examination of the draft Local Plan for Stroud district.

The inspectors requested that additional information be submitted by Stroud District Council, Gloucestershire County Council, South Gloucestershire Council and National Highways by 30th November. A response is now awaited from the Inspectors in the coming weeks, to confirm whether or not they will allow a 6 month pause in the Examination in Public of the draft Local Plan. All the information can be found in the Examination Library. Once the Planning Inspectors have authorised publication of the most recent responses from the councils, they will also be published here:

<https://www.stroud.gov.uk/environment/planning-and-building-control/planning-strategy/stroud-district-local-plan-review/local-plan-examination/examination-library>

Other issues

Rural England Prosperity Fund - £400,000 available for grant funding

Applications are now open for small rural businesses, community organisations, parish & town councils in Stroud district to apply for a share of a £400,000 fund.

Stroud District Council has been awarded £100,000 for 2023-24 and £300,000 for 2024-25 by the Government's Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF).

Eligible organisations can apply for grant of £3,000 - £20,000. The funding is for capital projects and must be spent on lasting assets such as a building or equipment. In most cases 60% match funding will be required. The fund aims to address some specific challenges facing micro and small businesses and to help them create jobs and boost community cohesion.

For community group awards, the fund is seeking to invest in activities that enhance physical, cultural and social ties and amenities.

The following organisations are eligible to apply for REPF:

- Micro-businesses (fewer than 10 employees)
- Small businesses (fewer than 250 employees)
- Social enterprises & Community Interest Companies
- Town & Parish councils
- Registered charities
- Public sector organisations
- Higher and further education institutions
- Constituted community / voluntary groups.

REPF will be of interest to organisations operating in the following areas:

- Tourism & the visitor economy
- Heritage
- Farm diversification
- Co-working spaces, networking groups & shared workspaces
- Food & drink entrepreneurs, breweries
- Pet/equine facilities & health
- Arts & cultural organisations, galleries, museums, libraries
- Community shops & hubs
- Community gardens, green spaces
- Repair cafes & mend workshops.

The provisional grant dates are:

Activity	Round One	Round Two
Application submission deadline	01/12/2023	17/01/2024
Assessment period	01/12 – 8/12/2023	17/01 – 24/01/2024
Grants Panel	12/12/2023*	25/01/2024*
Grant Funding Agreements issued for review and signature	By 12/12/2023	By 01/02/2024
Deadline for return of signed Grant Funding Agreements	By 5/01/2024	By 19/02/2024
Spend to be confirmed **grant will be available 7 – 14 days after confirmation of spend	28/02/2024	28/02/2024

*subject to availability of a grants panel quorum.

Find out whether your organisation is eligible to apply for the funding on the SDC website: www.stroud.gov.uk/REPF

Application forms and grant enquiries can be sent to economic.development@stroud.gov.uk

Swimming pools receive £176k funding boost

Local swimming pools have received a share of £20 million in central Government funding to help keep them afloat in response to increased operating costs. Stroud District Council has successfully bid for £176,000 from the Swimming Pool Support Fund which will help pay for heating, maintenance and chemicals at the Pulse leisure centre pool in Dursley, and the community-run Wotton Pool in Wotton-under-Edge.

Operating costs including but not limited to heating, alongside general inflationary pressure has increased considerably over recent months, with local authorities facing greater challenges to make ends meet as a result. £165,000 has been secured for The Pulse, and £11,000 for Wotton Pool. Stratford Park Leisure Centre was not eligible for this fund.

John Buist, a trustee of Wotton Pool said: *“Wotton Pool has enjoyed a very busy season but has experienced a doubling of its electricity costs and seen lifeguard pay costs rise significantly in the last two years. These are the two largest costs in the pool's budget. The Swimming Pool Support Fund award will help the pool to keep planning for the long term and ensure the much-loved facility continues to be available in future years.”*

Natural Flood Management – graphic comic: The Sound of a River

A new free-of-charge comic book aims to change the way young people understand climate challenges. An innovative downloadable graphic comic based in the Stroud district has been released with the aim of inspiring a new generation of environmental managers.

The Sound of a River was written by Stroud District Council officer Chris Uttley and illustrated by local artist Joe Magee. The book tells the story of Monica, a girl who sets out to find out why her house has flooded. She travels back in time to learn that historical changes made to the river have not only resulted in the loss of wildlife and plants, but also increased the likelihood of flooding.

The title is based on the idea that a healthy river generates a variety of sounds, therefore the healthier and more natural the river, the more sounds it creates. Historical land drainage and river engineering have

simplified and deepened channels, causing the river to fall silent. Each page of the book is accompanied by illustrations from the Stroud district and some pages have explanatory notes.

SDC's Stroud Valleys Natural Flood Management project was initiated by community groups after areas of Stroud were flooded in 2007 and 2012. The award-winning project implements nature-based measures such as creating 'leaky dams' - positioning fallen trees across water courses to slow the flow of flood water - resulting in less water travelling downstream and so reducing the risk of flooding. Working in partnership with landowners, more than 900 natural flood interventions have been installed so far.

Sound of a River is hosted on the NBS Comics website and can be downloaded [here](#).

Museum in the Park – Annual closure

Following a Festive Winter Weekend event on 2-3rd December, the Council-run museum will close for two months from 4 December 2023 to 27 January 2024 for the installation of a low carbon heating system, and its usual conservation clean. The museum's annual closure for deep cleaning and essential maintenance will be extended this year as the Grade II listed building is part of an ambitious [£5million project to replace aging gas boilers with brand new renewable heating systems](#) at three Stroud District Council-owned sites – Stratford Park Leisure Centre and The Museum in the Park in Stroud and The Pulse leisure centre in Dursley. The cutting-edge green technology will be supplemented by additional solar panels.

People can stay in touch with the museum while it is closed by opening a daily advent calendar on Facebook and Instagram, and by joining the Museum's [free-of-charge membership](#).

The Museum in the Park, managed by Stroud District Council in collaboration with the Stroud District (Cowle) Museum Trust, is situated in a Grade II listed 17th Century former wool merchant's house. The museum tells the extraordinary and diverse history of Stroud district and has over 4,000 objects and artefacts on display – from dinosaur bones to one of the world's first lawnmowers.

Recognition for Stroud DC work to tackle the climate emergency

Stroud District Council's actions towards tackling the climate emergency have earned it joint 8th place among all councils in the UK and the highest performing council in Gloucestershire.

The council has jumped two places on last year. The assessment was carried out by Climate Emergency UK, which measures the strength of council's written climate action plans. It consisted of more than 90 questions over seven areas of activity that councils have control or influence over: Buildings & Heating, Transport, Governance & Finance, Planning, Biodiversity, Collaboration & Engagement and Waste Reduction & Food, between January and August 2023.

Stroud District Council was the first in Europe to become carbon neutral for emissions in its direct control. In November 2018 it declared a climate change emergency and pledged to do everything within its power to make the Stroud district carbon neutral by the year 2030.

The website resource is a great starting point for anyone looking to make a positive impact on the environment: <https://www.stroud.gov.uk/environment/building-a-sustainable-future-together/what-can-you-do>.