

Stroud District Councillors' Report – February 2024

Report of meetings during January 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

Community Services & Licensing Committee – 18th January

A new **Cultural Strategy** for Stroud district. Engagement has been undertaken with local arts associations, other organisations and residents. A paper will be presented setting out proposals for the strategy at the next committee meeting.

Leisure Services Project – an interim Leisure Services Manager has now been appointed, to set up the new leisure service including both The Pulse in Dursley which is already managed by Stroud DC and Stratford Park Leisure Centre in Stroud, which will be managed by Stroud DC from 1st November. Work is underway on the IT systems, branding, marketing, communications and fitness equipment procurement for both sites. A condition survey on the Lido and Stratford Park Leisure Centre has now been completed, which will inform the future investment programme.

Serious Violence Duty – A new Duty commenced on 31st January 2023. Responsible authorities already had to consider the implication on crime, disorder, and anti-social behaviour in all their day-to-day activities regardless of department. The new additional statutory duty is for Serious Violence, with authorities responsible for including it in any relevant plan or priority to tackle serious violence in all its forms.

Gloucestershire authorities have agreed that the Office of the Gloucestershire Police & Crime Commissioner (OPCC) (Safer Gloucestershire) is best placed to take the lead, on behalf of all the specified authorities for the strategic and analytical work and responses to the Home Office on how the duty is being met, with local Community Safety Partnerships.

Other reports were noted as follows:

- Museum in the Park (Cowle Trust)
- Police and Crime Panel
- Citizens Advice
- Woodchester Mansion
- Cost of Living Information Sheet

Licensing Sub-Committee - 8th January

Application granted as requested and subject to conditions, for a new street trading consent for Gravity Greek Street Food Van. The van will be located in a private car park off Castle Street at rear of 35B Parsonage Street, Dursley.

Development Control Committee – 23rd January

- **Tree Protection Order** - New TPO/0591 - Beech Tree at 118 Thrupp Lane, Thrupp, Stroud, Gloucestershire S.23/2346/NEWTPO – Confirmed.
- **Sunnyside Nurseries, Cam**, Dursley, Gloucestershire S.23/1327/FUL
Redevelopment of the site for storage and distribution use (Use Class B8) and Dance Studio (Use Class E(d)) with ancillary office, cafe and showroom. associated works, infrastructure, and improvements to the existing access onto the A38. Revised proposal following the outline consent granted under S.21/1829/OUT. Permitted.
- **Hunger Hill, Dursley**, Gloucestershire S.23/1604/FUL
New dwelling and parking including demolition of existing garage and associated works. Permitted.
- **Extra planning officers**– Two new posts will be included in the budget for 2024/25:
 - New Biodiversity Net Gain officer - they will collaborate and complement the existing ecological specialists and the Strategic Lead for Nature Recovery and Biodiversity.
 - New Planning Enforcement officer – to enable the team to meet incoming enforcement referral demand and reduce the backlog.
- **Planning fees** – planning applications fees are set nationally and increased from December 2023 by 25-35%. Pre-application fees are set locally, and these fees will increase in line with cost recovery.

Strategy & Resources Committee – 1st February

District Council budget for 2024/25

The proposed council budget would mean an increase in the District Council's share of council tax of 2.99%, which would result in an increase of 13p per week for the average Band D household. Stroud DC's services make up approximately 11% of the Council Tax bill, with the other elements being the services provided by Gloucestershire County Council, the Police and Crime Commissioner for Gloucestershire, and Parish and Town Councils.

Included in the budget is money to help market towns and community groups, invest in play and leisure facilities, and improvement works around Stroud station. The budget reflects the Council's strategic plan by investing in communities, the environment, and local economy.

The proposed budget also sets out investment in the Council's waste and recycling service with a switch away from diesel-powered refuse collection vehicles to a greener option, as well as projects to support community climate action and nature recovery. The council will continue to invest in building new and eco-efficient council homes, support the network of Community Hubs across the district.

In response to calls from local business about the importance of parking provision, the budget proposes to freeze 85% of car parking charges in Stroud for the second year running, and to extend the current "Free after 3pm" offer, to "Free after 2pm" at the London Road car park and Brunel Mall multi-story car park in Stroud, as proposed by Stroud District Chamber of Trade and Stroud Town Council. A new digital sign to show the available spaces at the multi-story car park will also be installed along with secure cycle storage and bike parking spaces. At car parks across the district, EV charging points are being rolled out and two car parks in Stonehouse and Lower Stratford Park will be resurfaced.

For Stroud railway station, £200,000 is earmarked in the budget to acquire land which will provide pedestrian and cyclist access from the multi-story car park into the station, and for purchasing the historic Brunel-designed Goods Shed to secure the future of Stroud Valleys Artspace on this site.

For the Housing Revenue Account, Committee agreed that from 1st April social and affordable rents, will be increased by 7.7% in line with national rent guidance.

Council tax schemes from April 2024

- Committee agreed to extend the current Council Tax **Support Scheme** for another year. This provides up to 100% support to around 2,900 working age households in Stroud district who are on low incomes. Government has committed that all eligible residents over the state pension will continue to be entitled to up to 100 % support with their council tax bill (approx. 2,600 households), regardless of local policy.
- A new Council Tax **Premium on second homes** will apply from 01 April 2025
- The Council Tax **Premium for empty homes** will be amended to be 100% for properties empty between one and five years (currently two and five years) from 01 April 2025.
- The Council Tax **Discount for Care Leavers** will extend the qualifying age from 21 to 24 and include care leavers from outside of Gloucestershire.

The final District Council budget will be decided at the Council meeting on 22nd February.

Other reports

- **Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)** - Spending Allocations For 2024/2025. CIL funding helps to provide for any additional demand placed on local infrastructure created by new housing growth, in accordance with adopted planning policy. Funding allocations for the 2023 application round were recommended to Environment Committee in December 2023, and the funding allocation was then approved by the Strategy and Resources Committee on 1st February.
- **The Fair Pay and Senior Pay** Policy Statement – the annual statement was shared. The council continues to pay the Living Wage Foundation living wage (the real living wage) to staff on the lowest pay grade (£12.00 per hour since October 2023). Excluding the apprentice grade, the pay ratio between the highest and lowest employees of the council is 1:6.
- **Corporate Asset Management Plan** with action plans for all the assets of the council was approved. This includes the leisure centres, the Brunel Mall in Stroud and Woodchester Mansion.
- **Market Towns Vitality Fund** - £200k was allocated to this fund. £150k will be allocated to projects, and £50k will cover district council officer time for engagement and administrative costs. The next step is to begin the engagement process with stakeholders and interested parties, working throughout with the relevant Town Councils. Feedback from the recent District Chamber of Trade consultation exercises will be taken into account. Priorities and potential actions to be supported by the fund will be identified during the spring and summer, with decisions on funding support to be made in Autumn 2024. The amount of funding to be allocated to individual market towns will be determined by the engagement process and the priorities and actions identified. There may be some projects that are more appropriate to deliver on a wider geographic basis, potentially even district-wide, to benefit more than one market town.
- **Refugee Housing in Gloucestershire** – Update from a recent Leadership Gloucestershire meeting sets out that all the District Councils and County Council are committed to working together to ensure that refugees who are granted leave to remain, do not become homeless. This is a current concern as the Home Office has been working to ‘clear the backlog’ of asylum cases and to close asylum seeker hotels.

Audit & Standards Committee – 30th January

The Committee reviewed various reports and updates:

- Contract Management Framework Update
- External Audit activity progress.
- Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit Report

- Half year Treasury Management report 2023/24
- Treasury Management Strategy 24/25
- Update on Annual Governance Statement Action Plan
- Internal Audit Progress Update Report
- Corporate Risk Register Update

Extraordinary Council Meeting on the Local Plan Review – 25th January

This meeting was called by the Conservative Group to discuss the Local Plan. The Council resolved to note an update report ([link](#)). As the draft Local Plan is currently at Examination in Public, this report was for briefing purposes only and there is no change to the work underway on the Local Plan.

A detailed document with Frequently Asked Questions on the Local Plan Review was shared prior to the meeting, and is available on the website ([link](#)).

At the beginning of February 2024, the Council received a further letter from the Planning Inspectors ([link](#)), confirming that they agree to pause the Examination in Public process as requested by the Council, and that this pause will be for a duration of ten months. This comprises seven months to complete the work set out in the proposed Joint Action Plan, and three months to undertake a period of public consultation. The Examination is due to resume on 5 December 2024. SDC will now continue work with the local transport authorities, National Highways and other relevant parties to complete the Action Plan tasks with a view to achieving a sound Local Plan.

An update to the National Planning Policy Framework in December 2023, provides encouragement to local authorities at an advanced stage of plan making, to continue with the examination process, by requiring them to demonstrate a four year housing land supply (as compared to the usual five years requirement). The calculation of a four year housing land supply is more favourable to Stroud district than the five year land supply calculation, and should ensure that the district does not become subject to 'planning by appeal'.

Local news

Housing Committee review of options for ageing timber homes

The Council is reviewing options for tenants of ageing Swedish timber houses, including those in North Nibley, Stinchcombe and Wotton. The Council owns more than 5,000 affordable homes for rent, including 21 Swedish timber properties. They were bought by the UK Government from Sweden just after the Second World War as part of the support package provided to address the housing crisis. They were prefabricated and had a design life of 60 years. They require major investment to bring them up to modern energy efficiency and quality standards. The council has to decide on the best solution for the future of these homes, and this includes several options in a review: refurbishment, disposal, or redevelopment. There will be different solutions depending on their condition, repair and improvement costs, location, and ownership. The Housing Committee will review the officer recommendations on 6th February.

Events for women organised by Cotswold Canals Connected

Paddle boarding, photography, and nature walks and talks have been lined up as part of a dedicated programme of events just for women. Cotswold Canals Connected has partnered with Love Her Wild, to bring women in the Stroud district safe and fun canal-based events. Love Her Wild is a not-for-profit women's adventure organisation that puts on outdoor events across the UK to boost wellbeing, increase confidence and create better connections with nature.

Preparations for local elections on 2nd May

To recruit people to work in polling stations on election day Stroud District Council is holding a polling station drop-in information event, complete with a mock polling station, on Wednesday 7 February from 3pm – 7pm at SDC offices at Ebley Mill, Stroud. Visitors will be able to see behind the scenes at a polling station, try their hand at issuing a ballot paper, and find out about the different roles available. Experienced polling station staff can find out more about the new regulations in place for voter ID, and which types of ID are acceptable.

Stroud District Council employed 424 temporary election staff during the 2021 elections who between them issued more than 139,000 ballot papers. There are more than 97,000 voters in the Stroud district and 104 polling stations in village halls, community buildings and even a couple in local pubs.

Polling stations are staffed by paid poll clerks and presiding officers. They set up the polling station and ensure that voters are able to cast their vote in secret, checking ID and aiding if necessary. Training will be given prior to the election. Payment for these roles in 2021 was £213.20 for a poll clerk and £297 for a presiding officer. The fees for these roles are set across Gloucestershire and are in the process of being finalised for the 2 May elections. With new voter ID regulations the council needs extra people to help the polling stations run smoothly. Polling station staff work for approximately 16 hours on election day, as stations open at 7am and close at 10pm, and they stay in the polling station the entire time. Presiding officers must be able to drive as they transport the ballot boxes to the count venue at the end of the day.

More information about the roles and an application form is available on the SDC website www.stroud.gov.uk/2024electionjobs

Be a Councillor event – 21 February

A 'Be a Councillor' event will be held at the SDC Offices on 21 February at 6pm for anyone interested in standing for election in the district, town or parish elections. More information will be available on the council website.

Play area renovation

Work started to renovate Stratford Park play area on 22nd January. The main play area will benefit from a new toddler multi play unit, junior tower, trio climber, and a climbing unit. The transformation is expected to take up to one month. This means the play area will be closed during this time. So far Acacia Drive, Archway Gardens, Wharfdale Way, Mason Road & Cambridge Avenue play areas have been revamped by contractor Kompan.

Museum in the Park reopens

The Museum's reopening was marked with a snowdrop celebration event on 27 - 28 January. The museum's annual closure for deep cleaning and essential maintenance was extended this year as the to install air source heat pumps and additional solar panels.

Museum event information can be found on the museum's website and by signing up to the free-of-charge membership programme www.museuminthepark.org.uk/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.