

County Councillor Report –7th April 2024

Prepared by Cllr Linda Cohen

Stroud District Council

You will know by now that I will be standing in May as a Liberal Democrat candidate for the forthcoming elections. I have not taken this decision lightly but increasingly I have recognised that to be able to effectively serve all the needs of residents I also need to have a seat at Stroud District Council. Cllr Ken Tucker will be supporting me with his extensive experience and I hope that this will allow me to be able to champion Wotton and the surrounding parishes and ensure that we all benefit from the same focus and amenities as the rest of the county.

Highways

The continuous rainfall has meant that Highways are inundated with pothole issues, overflowing gullies and drains and general flooding.

[FixMyStreet \(gloucestershire.gov.uk\)](https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/fixmystreet) is working and issues are being dealt with promptly. I would ask all residents to continue to be proactive and report anything about which they have a concern. A reminder that raising a Fix My Street ticket results in an immediate safety inspection which will trigger immediate resolution if there is any safety risk or a commitment to complete work e.g. potholes within 28 days.

I would also ask residents to do all they can to keep drains outside their homes clear of superficial debris and also not to park over drain covers if an incident has been reported, to allow maintenance work to be completed.

Playgrounds, children and youth facilities

I have done an audit of the local playgrounds after finding the Bearlands play area neglected and with a broken sign. I have arranged for the sign to be repaired and the playground to be weeded and replanted by a community group.

I am concerned that we have not yet provided an alternative recreational opportunity for our secondary pupils having closed the youth club. I will be making this a focus over the next few weeks and will be looking at how Build Back Better money can be targeted to meet this need.

Last week I met with the group of young people whose behaviour has been causing concern around Rope Walk and The Chipping. I have made it clear that they have as much right as any of us to use

public spaces but that their behaviour should not result in damage. I intercepted fighting and kicking the toilet door and hanging off young trees and explained about the remedial costs and the personal cost to council tax payers who are struggling to pay for food and warmth. I think I heard a penny drop. The discussion was friendly. Let's see.

Synwell Playing Field Association has been awarded a grant from my Build Back Better fund.

Wotton Pool has also been awarded a small grant towards lifeguard training. This is an essential service which allows our pool to stay open. It's also a valuable life skill and provides an employment opportunity when our young people move to further education and training.

The pool opens on April 13th. Please make use of it this summer. It is always warm and in summer you could be in the South of France!

Tabernacle

I have been approached by residents to tackle the increasing problems with parking and congestion. It is becoming more difficult for businesses to operate and residents to access their homes, during busy sale and collections periods at the auction rooms. This is going to need to be a collaborative effort with give and take on all sides. We need to allow one of our most successful businesses to provide a good experience for buyers and sellers but also to protect the rights of residents and most importantly to ensure the safety of everyone. The current situation is not satisfactory and without action there will be an accident.

Kingswood

I have followed up on the progress of the TRO. I have been told that there is no way to move our case up the list but that it has been flagged as urgent.

North Nibley

Huge thanks to the children who led the litter pick recently and to the parish clerk for the brilliant organisation and refreshments. The verges had recently been cut, revealing a sea of litter. Cllr Lisa Carr and I had a competitive treasure hunt. I think a pair of motor cycle boots and an Apha Romeo badge trump several bin bags of wine and lager bottles but she remains to be convinced.

Please take your litter home!

Stinchcombe

I have agreed a Build Back Better grant of £8,000 to put the first spade in the ground for the new play area project and allow the group to raise match funding. I hope this will provide a wonderful space for all village residents and bring the community together.

Ham and Stone / Alkington

A working party has been formed to develop campaign with clear objectives to transform the safety of the stretch of the A38 that runs from Berkeley to Falfield – a meeting will be planned in the next fortnight to move this forward. I have arranged a meeting with Highways to scope out possible improvements.

Recycling Centres

I am aware that many households in Ham, Stone and Alkington would prefer to use South Glos facilities rather than making the longer trip to Horsley. I have started discussions with officers at GCC and South Glos councils to see how we can deliver a new system which would provide funding to South Glos to allow for this to happen (sooner rather than later). I will update next month.

Buses 84/85 (and all other services)

- Bus service to remain until September '24

A wonderful celebration of a year with the Big Lemon and the opportunity this week to welcome our new bus driver Debbie who is a fantastic and cheerful addition to the team. We remain indebted to Barbara Lawrence and Janet Young for their tireless commitment to this campaign.

Please Get On The Bus. Promote the 84/85.

NB : I meet with Cabinet next week and will be tabling questions again at full council to demand resolution. Separately the Liberal Democrat political assistant is in discussions with South Glos and WECA.

Build Back Better

I still have some money to allocate and welcome final approaches from community groups and projects that need support. In the first instance email linda.cohen@gloucestershire.gov.uk with details of the project and your contact number and I will follow up with a phone call.

Worth noting (please see my comments)

New look for innovative Robin service

For information only – we must continue to fight to retain the 84/85

Bookable bus service The Robin has been connecting rural residents with their next destination for over a year. This week new Robin promotional materials have been launched for the North Cotswolds Robin area, highlighting a clear message of “easy and convenient”.

Friendly and reliable drivers serve the North Cotswolds and ensure travel is simple and accessible to all. With affordable fares capped at £2 until 31 December 2024, and concessionary bus pass holders travelling for free, there’s never been a better time to get out and about.

The Robin launched in autumn 2022 as a dual pilot in the North Cotswolds and Forest of Dean. Uptake of the Robin has been very high in the Forest of Dean, though less so in the North Cotswolds. With that in mind there will be an increase in promotional activity to help residents understand the service and encourage its use.

The North Cotswolds area covered by The Robin stretches from Northleach to Moreton-in-Marsh, and includes Stow-on-the-Wold and Winchcombe.

The county council is also planning to launch three new Robin areas before mid-summer, including South Cotswolds, **Berkeley Vale** and Tewkesbury District.

The user-friendly service connects passengers with their next destination, whether that’s a medical appointment, leisure activity or a shopping location, or a link with onward travel. Bookings are easy and simple and can be made online or over the phone or through the app. Payment couldn’t be simpler with online, cash or card on board as options.

To book go to www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/therobin or call 0345 2638139.

Public invited to drop-in sessions for adult social care consultation

Gloucestershire County Council is inviting residents to find out more about proposed changes to its adult social care fairer contributions policy at local drop-in sessions.

Adult Social Care services are paid for by the county council with contributions from the individuals it supports. People can be charged for their care and asked to make a contribution in line with their financial circumstances.

The council wants to make sure its fairer contributions policy is clear, accessible, and fair, to support individuals with choice and control over their care. Following a public engagement in 2023, the council reviewed its fairer contributions policy and is proposing changes which include:

- increasing the Minimum Income Guarantee (either for everyone or for some), and a change to the Disability Related Expenditure process, which may allow some people to keep more of their income
- a change to how the council charges for short break and respite care and
- the introduction of an admin fee for people who pay the full cost of their care, but wish the council to arrange care and support services on their behalf.

Residents are invited to find out more at drop-in information sessions:

- Wednesday 10 April 2024 – The One Gloucestershire information bus will be at the Market Place in Cirencester between 10am and 3pm
- Thursday 11 April 2024 – There will be an information stand in the atrium at Gloucestershire Royal Hospital between 10am and 3pm
- Friday 12 April 2024 – The One Gloucestershire information bus will be at the High Street in Cheltenham between 10am and 3pm

We will be arranging further events across the county and details of these sessions will be shared on social media, and on the consultation webpage which has been recently updated to include an additional factsheet which shows how changes to the Minimum Income Guarantee could affect individuals.

Everyone is encouraged to have their say, whether they currently pay for their care or may do so in the future, to make sure that it works for people now and for years to come.

People can share their views by taking part in an online survey and by attending the drop-in sessions or focus groups. To find out more and to have your say, visit the survey at <http://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/fairer-contributions-policy>

The consultation will end on 6 May 2024.

There will be no changes to the fairer contributions policy, and therefore no changes to how residents are assessed to pay for their care, until the public consultation has concluded, and all feedback has been considered.

Stroud Library set to open in new location

(Some useful new resources)

Stroud Library will be opening its doors to the public in its new location in the Five Valleys Shopping Centre on Tuesday 2 April.

It is moving from its old location in Lansdown to a more central and accessible site, designed to meet the needs of people who use it.

The library will be based on the lower ground floor of the shopping centre in King Street, next to the Five Valleys Medical Practice, with a ground level shop front entrance.

It will be in a completely refurbished area where you can browse a vast range of adult and children's books. A new Lab area will provide the opportunity to experience 3D design/print, Virtual Reality, access to the full adobe creative suites, and much more. Other services include a new bookable meeting room, free computer access for members and printing.

As well as being more accessible, the new location also has more environmental benefits as electric vehicle charging points are available within the shopping centre and the building is heated and cooled by an air source heat pump.

The library will open on Tuesday 2 April at 10am and goodie bags will be gifted to the first 100 customers. These include books for children, library and lab merchandise and the opportunity to win gift vouchers.

There will be events happening throughout the day, including get to know the Lab workshops.

The Library is free to join and people are encouraged to sign up to the library before the opening day if they aren't already a member. To join, please visit <https://gloucestershire.spydus.co.uk/cgi-bin/spydus.exe/MSGTRN/WPAC/JOIN> and you will receive a physical membership card when you visit.

100 electric vehicle charging points installed around county

I am in discussions to ensure that Wotton has its fair allocation of the balance 870 points and that provision does not end at Stroud. I will be asking questions at the next full council meeting and lobbying cabinet member David Gray.

Work on installing 1,000 electric vehicle (EV) charging points in Gloucestershire over the next three years is progressing well, with the first 100 now installed around the county.

By the end of March, nearly 130 chargepoints will have been installed, which will act as a springboard to step up the rollout in the next financial year 2024/25.

The programme has been given a further boost with the announcement that the Department for Transport (DfT) has confirmed the award of £3.629 million to Gloucestershire from its Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) Capital Fund.

This will be used to step up the scale of the rollout so even more chargepoints can be installed across the county.

More than 30 sites were initially chosen to be part of the first phase of the rollout after residents were invited to give their feedback.

The [locations for the first phase of the rollout, along with more information, can be found here](#) and further locations are being identified to continue the rollout.

To ensure value for money, two twin chargepoints have been installed in many locations, so four EVs can be charged. However in areas with the greatest parking pressures only two bays for EVs are being marked out initially, before there is demand to fill four bays.

The council made it a high priority to find sites in the Stroud district after some locations were dropped following feedback. As a result chargepoints have been installed in Bowbridge Lane, Stroud, and Nortonwood, Nailsworth.

The programme is part of the county council's strategy to create a Greener Gloucestershire, by helping to reduce the impact of transport on our climate and improve local air quality. The scheme is funded by the county council and the Department for Transport's On Street Residential Chargepoint Scheme (ORCS).

Greater availability of public chargepoints will make it easier for residents to switch to EVs. One third of homes in Gloucestershire lack the ability to charge an EV on a driveway, which is why the council and government are prioritising chargepoints in locations where off-street parking is not available.

These new chargepoints have been installed in public areas, giving residents greater confidence that they will be able to charge their EV either near their home, while working or when out and about in the county.

Around one third of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions in Gloucestershire come from transport, of which private vehicle use accounts for over half of this (55 per cent). However switching from fossil fuel to electric vehicles has the potential to reduce carbon emissions significantly.

The county council has appointed Connected Kerb to install and run its network of chargers. Residents can share their views on where they think new charging points should be located by [registering their interest here](#).

Find out more about how you can reduce your travel emissions on the Thinktravel website: <https://www.thinktravel.info>

Keep up to date with the latest climate change news from the council by [subscribing to the Greener Gloucestershire Climate Action newsletter](#).

Have your say on proposed changes to Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service

Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service (GFRS) is seeking the views of the public on proposed changes to the service, which would include an increase in fire cover in line with risk and demand across the county.

The proposals include an increase of 14 firefighters (including crew and watch managers) in the county, with the introduction of a new day shift station at Cinderford.

There would also be a change to a 12-hour shift pattern. The shift pattern changes from 9-hour-day and 15-hour-night shifts to 12-hour shifts could improve the ability to have the right people, in the right place to respond to emergencies and provide prevention and community safety as well as benefit the health and safety of firefighters.

The consultation starts on Monday 18 March and lasts for 12 weeks, ending on Sunday 9 June 2024. For more information and to take part, please go to: www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/glosfire-consultation

GFRS wants to hear the views and feedback of Gloucestershire communities, workforce and stakeholders on the proposals. No decisions or changes to fire resources will be made until the public consultation has been concluded. GFRS wants to ensure it keeps communities safe through reviewing its resources to meet its priorities outlined in its Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2022-2026.

Mark Preece, Chief Fire Officer at Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service, said: “We continually assess how we best serve the communities of Gloucestershire and after reviewing modelling and available data in accordance with our CRMP 2022-2026, we are consulting on an increase in fire cover in the county.

“These proposed changes could improve our response to emergencies, increase protection and prevention activities which will benefit community safety and the health and safety of our firefighters. We want to hear your views, whether you live, work or travel in Gloucestershire,

£600 per month for Homes for Ukraine hosts approved for next year

A £600 monthly 'thank you' payment for people hosting Ukrainian refugees has been extended for the next financial year.

All hosts in Gloucestershire offering accommodation for Ukrainian nationals and their immediate family members through the Homes for Ukraine scheme will continue to get £600 a month to thank them for their support.

Funding from central government provides a payment of £350 or £500 per month for hosts depending on whether their Ukrainian guests are in their first or second year in the UK.

In March 2023, the county council approved an increase to the 'thank you' payment to £600 per month for all hosts. This offered more support and stability to hosts and their guests, particularly while the cost of living was rising.

The £600 monthly payment has been extended to continue for at least the next financial year to 31 March 2025.

Homes for Refugees

With the success of this national scheme, the county council has recently launched [Homes for Refugees](#): a local scheme to help refugees from other countries rebuild their lives.

Gloucestershire residents with a spare room, annexe, or even another property, can host a refugee for short-term placements of up to three months and receive £600 per month. Both hosts and guests receive wrap-around support to help their guests to move towards independence.

The scheme is for refugees who have been granted asylum, meaning they have the legal right to live and work in the UK, having fled conflict or persecution in their own country.

Once an asylum claim is approved, refugees must move out of Home Office accommodation. The Homes for Refugees scheme is designed to give those who have had a successful asylum application a safe and supportive home where they can make longer term plans, such as securing employment and more permanent accommodation.

Could you become a host?

If you would be interested in supporting a refugee, from Ukraine or elsewhere, please get in touch by emailing HFR@gloucestershire.gov.uk.

For more information, or to request an informal call with a member of the team visit www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/homes-for-refugees.

Electric buses coming to county with almost £6million funding award

Gloucestershire County Council has been awarded nearly £6million by the Department of Transport (DfT) to introduce Zero Emission Buses (ZEBs) in the county.

The award of £5,900,000 will fund up to 58 ZEBs in the county, meaning more than 20 per cent of Gloucestershire's buses will be electric.

Secretary of State for Transport, and MP for the Forest of Dean, Mark Harper MP visited the Stagecoach West depot in Cheltenham to announce the funding award on Thursday 21 March.

The county council worked with bus operators Stagecoach, Pulhams and Lydney Dial a Ride to submit a joint funding application to the Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas 2 (ZEBRA 2) programme.

The successful bid will unlock total investment into electric buses and infrastructure of more than £29million, which includes the government funding, contributions from the county council and Forest of Dean District Council, and substantial private sector investment.

It is part of Gloucestershire's ambition to replace older diesel buses and move towards a zero emission bus fleet, helping to decarbonise transport and encourage more people to travel on buses.

The benefits will include the removal of an estimated 59,069 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions and an estimated 30 tonnes of nitrogen oxide emissions over the lifetime of the buses, supporting the county council's aims of becoming carbon net zero by 2045 and helping to create a greener Gloucestershire.

The transport operators involved in the project will be ordering the vehicles and infrastructure, such as charging points, later this year. The first electric buses are expected to be in service in late 2025/early 2026, allowing time for infrastructure delivery and vehicle manufacturing.

Gloucestershire's bid included the following routes:

- Routes 94 and 94x serve Gloucester and Cheltenham and offer an opportunity to electrify one of Gloucestershire's busiest bus routes
- Route T links Bishop Cleeve and Tewkesbury, complements the 41 and 71, and would complete the EV conversion of Stagecoach's Tewkesbury network
- Route 801 links Moreton-in-Marsh to Stow-on-the-Wold, Bourton-on-the-Water and Cheltenham. This route would see investment in one of our emerging express-bus corridors and provide links to the Gloucestershire 'Robin' service in the north Cotswolds and to rail services at Moreton-in-Marsh station
- Route 777 serves Lydney to Coleford. As with the 801, this is a truly rural bus route that would benefit a significant congestion hotspot and Air Quality Management Area (AQMA)

The county council's cabinet is being asked to move forward with the electric buses project at its meeting on Wednesday 27 March 2024.

More information and details of other proposed routes [are available to see in the cabinet report](#).

Gloucestershire County Council will launch its countywide hoarding care and support groups with an awareness event in April.

The Gloucestershire Hoarding Awareness Day, which has been organised by the county council in partnership with HoardingUK, will mark the launch of support groups in each of the county's districts.

The free event will be held at the Gloucester Guildhall between 1pm and 3pm on Thursday 11 April and will feature presentations on the subject as well as a question-and-answer session.

Hoarding behaviour has been clinically recognised and is characterised by accumulation of possessions that results in living spaces becoming cluttered to the point that their use or safety is compromised. Typically triggered by trauma, this anxiety disorders' symptoms result in significant distress or impairment in personal, family, social, educational, occupational or other important areas of functioning.

The new monthly groups aim to help individuals with these difficulties by offering a holistic approach to empower them. Trained enablement co-ordinators will facilitate these sessions.

Sessions had previously been held in Cheltenham and Gloucester, but will now be rolled out in Cirencester, Coleford, Stroud and Tewkesbury.

Several people have already benefited from the ongoing sessions, helping them to find short and long-term ways forward.

One attendee of the drop-in sessions, who has chosen to remain anonymous, said: "People with hoarding disorder have had trauma in their lives."

"Just getting a skip and getting rid of things doesn't fix that trauma and I would guarantee that the issue would be a lot worse within a year."

"The trauma itself needs to be dealt with in order to find solutions that are about the person, as well as the problem."

Hoarding disorder affects between up to two and five per cent of the population.

The attendee added: "I would encourage any people who are struggling with hoarding to go along to these sessions. It can help stop it getting as bad as it got for me.

"These groups have helped me to understand more about why I do this, which then helped me to be able to start to address it.

"People need to know that they don't need to suffer on their own. There are a lot of people in the same situation."

The county council's Enablement Service has increasingly been asked over the past few years to support people who have hoarding behaviours. It is hoped that by being able to offer this additional support through regular monthly group sessions, it will provide opportunities for people to make empowering decisions about the support they need.

Working in partnership with housing providers, the fire service, and other professionals the service aims to offer a holistic and a more joined up approach to support people in their own homes safely to manage risk to their health and wellbeing.

Megan Karnes, from HoardingUK, said: “While we are looking at complex mental health behaviour which is nearly double the number of people with other common conditions – there is still so little focus on trauma and anxiety within support models.

“These groups become the first therapeutic and practical step in providing person-centred support.”

To attend Gloucestershire’s Hoarding Awareness Day, book your spot at <https://hoardinguk.cademy.co.uk/gloucester-hoarding-awareness-day>.

For more information on the support sessions and how to get support, visit <https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/your-community/support-hub/your-mental-health-and-wellbeing/hoarding-support-group/>.

Alternatively email hoardingsupport@gloucestershire.gov.uk, or call 01452 425 427.

Simple steps to help prevent a cigarette fire in the home

Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service (GFRS) is reminding smokers to ‘Put it Out, Right Out’ whenever they light up, to help reduce fires in the home.

Fires caused by smoking products kill more people than fires caused by any other item. By taking simple steps, such as not smoking while tired, using a proper and secure ashtray and stubbing cigarettes out properly, this can greatly reduce the risk of an accidental fire breaking out.

To help you keep safe, GFRS is also reminding smokers to install smoke alarms on every level of the home and to test them regularly. Without a working smoke alarm, you are at least eight times more likely to die in an accidental fire in the home.

Other tips to follow to keep safe include:

- Never smoke in bed. It’s very easy to fall asleep while your cigarette is still burning and set furniture alight.
- Never smoke when under the influence of drugs or alcohol. If your lit cigarette starts a fire, you could be less able to escape.
- Never leave lit cigarettes, cigars or pipes unattended – they can easily overbalance as they burn down.

- Use a proper, heavy ashtray that can't tip over easily and is made of a material that won't burn.

For advice specific to you and your home, visit [HFSC \(safelincs.co.uk\)](https://www.hfsc.gov.uk) and complete your own home fire safety check.

The best way to remove any fire risk, as well as to improve your health, is to stop smoking. You can get support to quit from Gloucestershire Healthy Lifestyles Service.

It's free and you're four times more likely to do it with their support than trying alone – 75 per cent of people who've used the service have become smoke-free. You can contact them on 0800 755 553 or email glicb.hlsglos@nhs.net

Nathaniel Hooton, Deputy Chief Fire Officer at Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service said: "Fires ignited by cigarettes or smoking materials result in more fatalities than any other fire. Despite a fall in the overall number of fires caused by these products, it's still the biggest cause of accidental fires in the home across the country.

"Every smoker should be aware of the risks they take every time they light up and drop the habit of smoking indoors, especially in bed, or under the influence of alcohol. The risk of falling asleep before you 'put it out, right out' is just too great.

"You should also make sure you have working smoke alarms on every level of your home and test them at least monthly. Working smoke alarms can give you the extra time you need to escape if the worst should happen."

If you have any ideas that you'd like to discuss or community / personal issues that need my help please get in touch. Email linda.cohen@gloucestershire.gov.uk 07791110906

My remit includes: Education, Highways, Children and Families Services, Health and Social Care, The Environment, Apprenticeships, Employment and Business, Fire and Rescue, Police, Trading Standards and Waste Disposal (not collection).