

# Stroud District Councillors' Report – 1 November 2020

## Report of meetings during October

### Coronavirus Response

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#### Community Protection Officers

Stroud District Council has pooled an element of its £42,639 Government compliance ('Covid marshal') funding in a collaborative partnership with Tewkesbury, Cheltenham and Gloucester City to provide Community Protection Officers. Gloucester City Safe will provide additional support in the form of a team of two officers who will promote community safety, crime reduction and compliance with Covid-19 regulations for a temporary six-month period. The new officers will advise and support members of the public and businesses on following social distancing rules, with support from existing council staff – our Environmental Health Officers (EHOs), new Covid Compliance Officer and our Neighbourhood Wardens.

They will be at work during main business opening hours but also some early evenings and weekends, rotating around the districts in the partnership. At present they will not enforce rules but will complement the roles of police and council officers who do have enforcement powers by engaging with and advising local residents and businesses. They will have Body Worn Cameras which will help capture evidence in the case of repeat offenders and businesses who continue to flout the rules, for example on group gatherings and wearing face masks.

#### New Test and Trade Support Payment

On 12 October SDC started processing applications and making payments under the new Government Test and Trade payment. This payment is made to those on low incomes who are unable to work while self-isolating. Residents who meet the criteria are eligible for a one-off payment of £500. ([For more information, and to apply for a support payment.](#))

#### Provision of free meals for children during half term week

SDC worked with community groups over the October half term holiday to ensure that food was distributed to families who are in need, including those whose children normally receive free school meals. Food was provided by community organisations who supported people in need during the Coronavirus pandemic, which include GL11 Community Hub, Wotton Area Mutual Aid (WAMA), The Long Table and All Pulling Together (APT). Around 1,500 children in the Stroud district are eligible for free school meals, and WAMA provided food for almost 130 children in the Wotton Area. The County Council subsequently agreed to provide vouchers to those in receipt of free school meals.

### Climate change strategy consultation

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*"If we don't take climate action, the collapse of our civilisations and the extinction of much of the natural world is on the horizon." Sir David Attenborough.*

A consultation is now open until 16 December, on how Stroud District can lead the way in limiting, adapting, recovering, and responding to climate change, to protect future generations. The Council's operations are already carbon neutral and the aim of this strategy is to facilitate the whole district becoming carbon neutral by 2030, recognising that urgent action is needed to avoid severe impacts.

The 2030 Strategy sets out a context, rationale and approach for organising the work that will be needed. There are seven themes - Built Environment, Natural Environment, Energy, Mobility, Economy, Waste, and Community - plus 65 commitments, and 26 targets over the course of 10 years. SDC will have a role as an exemplar, encourager and enabler. Support from residents, business and the community will be needed to achieve the 2030 target.

A series of consultation events will launch a District Dialogue for information exchange to make sure the strategy and plan has been well explained and identify the main areas of interest. These include:

- **Town & Parish Councils** 10 November 4pm-6pm: nominated members of the Councils covering the Stroud District - restricted to one representative only.
- **Open Events** 10 November 10am – 12noon and 19 November 6pm – 8pm: open to whose living, working, studying or have an interest in the Stroud District.

For more information: <https://www.stroud.gov.uk/draft2030strategy>

## Council meetings

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

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

### Environment Committee – 15 October

**Local Plan Review** The Committee approved an additional **housing options consultation** and revision of the timetable for the new Local Plan.

This latest Local Plan Review consultation runs from 21 Oct to 16 Dec 2020:

[www.stroud.gov.uk/localplanreview](http://www.stroud.gov.uk/localplanreview).

Views are invited on the proposed new sites, which would be required if the Government increases the housebuilding target for the Stroud District. The Government-set target of 638 homes per year could rise to 786 if the Government raises it as part of its growth strategy.

The sites under consideration include land between the A38 and the M5 north of the A419 at Whitminster, and land between the A38 and the M5 at Moreton Valence.

The Local Plan maps out where homes and businesses will go, up to the year 2040 and currently Stroud District has to meet a target of almost 13,000 homes by then. If the target goes up, space for an extra 2,400 by 2040 will need to be found.

Two big challenges face the council because the western side of the District is predominantly an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the eastern half is in the River Severn floodplain. That means the A38/M5 corridor is one of the few areas left for most large-scale development. If the council does not allocate space for developers to build, the Government could direct where development takes place.

### Strategy & Resources Committee – 20 October

**Financial support for Stratford Park Leisure Centre** - The committee approved provision of additional short term support to the leisure contract provider in Stroud (Sport and Leisure Management (SLM)) to recover from the impact of Covid-19 to consider payment of a phased grant award. Stratford Park Leisure Centre has been hit hard since lockdown and this meant that the operator for Stratford Park Leisure Centre, SLM was forecast to be almost £300,000 worse off by the end of the financial year and risked not

being able to run the centre for the Council. SDC has agreed to meet operator SLM halfway with capped, monthly payments in arrears up to a total of no more than £150,000. Health and wellbeing is one of the council's five main priorities and Stratford Park Leisure Centre is a key part of keeping residents fit and well. SDC's other leisure centre, The Pulse in Dursley is run directly by the council.

### **Community Services & Licensing Committee – 1 October**

The Committee discussed:

- A verbal annual update from the **Police and Crime Commissioner**
- The review of Stroud District Council's **statement of licensing policy** – to review the final draft following consultation
- The extension of public space protection order – **prohibiting alcohol consumption** in designated places – noting the decision of the strategic director of communities to extend the existing public space protection orders for a further 3-year period from 20th October 2020.
- Commissioning of strategy for **leisure and wellbeing provision** in Stroud District - considered and approved the tender process for the commissioning of industry specialists to produce a strategy for leisure and wellbeing in Stroud District addressing the future provision of community leisure and wellbeing provision across the district.

### **Audit & Standards Committee – 6 October**

The Committee discussed:

- **Counter fraud and corruption** policy statement and strategy 2020-2023
- **Internal audit** activity progress report 2020/21 and the Internal audit plan 2020/21
- 1st quarter **treasury management activity** report 2020/21
- Proposed amendments to the **code of conduct** for members and the arrangements under which allegations can be investigated

### **Full Council – 22 October**

Council approved recommendations from the Community Services Committee, and the Audit & Standards Committee, including **changes to the code of conduct** for members and the arrangements under which allegations can be investigated.

The Council discussed the **budget strategy** 2021/22 to 2024/25 – which remains flexible given the current economic uncertainties in relation to council income and expenditure.

The Council agreed to accept £1,094,050 of capital funding from Central Government for a project to be delivered under the **Green Homes Grant** Local Authority Delivery Scheme (LADS). This will fund insulation for 100 park homes and 50 air source heat pumps for properties which are not on the gas grid, across Gloucestershire and South Gloucestershire.

A motion was approved (15 votes to 13, with 11 abstaining) about **making Stroud District Council more diverse and representative** of the residents of our District.

It was proposed by Councillor Whiteside (Green) and seconded by Councillor James (Lib Dem). The motion notes that no system of election is perfectly fair, but that the aim is to make those elected to the District Council as representative of the residents' wishes and demographics as is reasonably possible.

Following approval of the motion, the Chief Executive will write to the Government to request changes to legislation that would permit Stroud District Council to take steps to increase its diversity and representativeness by:

- (a) Allowing the Council to trial a more proportional voting system in District Council elections
- (b) Allowing job sharing of the elected councillor role
- (c) Allowing those aged 16 and over to vote in local elections.

It is unclear whether the current Government will agree to these requested changes, but this is an important recognition by the local authority that we need to take more active steps to improve representation of residents' wishes and to attract a wider and more representative group of elected councillors.

### **Development Control Committee – 16 October**

Discussed development proposals in Hunts Grove, Downend, land west of Stonehouse, Grove Lane, re: discharge of condition 46 - area masterplan - from approved application and public open space and strategic cycle link.

## **Council news**

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### **Affordable homes delivery**

A report to the Housing Committee last month noted that SDC had its best year so far in delivering new affordable homes for sale and rent. Some 198 units in total were facilitated by the council. The council's previous best was 142 in 2014. In 2019/20, 114 were rented units, 81 in shared ownership, one was a discounted sale, and two were offered under the Buy to Rent scheme.

Stroud District's population of 118,130 is spread over 47,640 private homes, 4,991 Council homes and 1,752 housing association homes. The population is predicted to grow to 136,000 by 2041. There are currently over 3,147 people on the housing register, with 21,114 young people, 70,802 working age adults, and 26,214 in retirement. The increase of people of pensionable age is anticipated to rise significantly in the future as a result of rising life expectancy and the demographic impacts of two generations of baby boomers.

### **Cotswold Canals Project Funding**

The National Lottery Heritage Fund announced on 16 October that it will grant £8.9 million to the Cotswold Canals Connected Project. This means that the five miles of canal already restored will be connected to the national inland waterway network at Saul Junction. As well as opening up another 4.5 miles of canal, the funding will see huge benefits in terms of the economy, leisure, community, health, heritage and the environment, including the creation of 21 hectares of biodiversity land, planting 30,000 trees and shrubs, generating additional spending of £5.5 million per year in the local economy, bringing health benefits estimated at £8 million a year, preserving the canal archives from the 1730s and involving up to 500 extra volunteers.

A partnership led by Stroud District Council and the Cotswold Canals Trust has already restored 5 miles of canal between Stonehouse and Thrupp, but connecting to Gloucester and Sharpness Canal at Saul will mean that boats can reach Stonehouse and Stroud from the whole of the national inland waterway network. The canal, known as the Stroudwater Navigation, was formally abandoned by an Act of Parliament in 1954. Work on the stretch between Stonehouse and Saul is expected to be completed by the end of 2023. Work is already underway on Whitminster roundabout and the new railway bridge at Stonehouse Ocean near St Cyr's Church.

The project is also looking to prioritise small local business owners, entrepreneurs and innovators and will be working with experts to create a wildlife corridor for people and nature and creating new jobs and training opportunities. Major funders for the project are The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Stroud District Council (£2.3m), Cotswold Canals Trust's members and donors' contributions (£2.2m), Gloucestershire County Council (£700,000) and the Canal & River Trust (£625,000). Cotswold Canals Trust will continue to fundraise for the remaining £1.2 million needed.