

Stroud District Councillors' Report – September 2021

Report of SDC and local interesting matters during August.

There were no formal Committee meetings in August.

New Council Plan

A new Council Plan has been prepared by the recently elected Cooperative Alliance administration (Labour, Green, Liberal Democrat) setting out the proposed priorities, objectives, key projects/ activity to be undertaken for delivery over the next five years – and focusing on the next three years of the administration.

The Council Plan is not an exhaustive list of everything that SDC will be doing – as the Council has many other statutory and delivery responsibilities. The draft Plan will be discussed at all our service committee meetings (Environment -Cllr James), Housing and Communities -Cllr Tucker) during September. Elected Members from all political parties will consider the activity within the plan as it progresses through the Council's governance structure.

The draft plan can be seen here: <https://stroud.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s1015/Item%205%20-%20Appendix%20A%20-%20Draft%20Council%20Plan.pdf>

Environment Committee (Cllr James)

Meeting documents have been published for the Committee meeting on 9 September. The Committee will be asked to approve a proposed Cycling and Walking Task & Finish Group to drive delivery on the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans for the district (as issued by Gloucestershire County Council), and to help realise Stroud District Council's wider Active Travel ambitions.

Meeting papers: <https://stroud.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=140&MId=1118&Ver=4>

Brimscombe Port.

SDC's exciting plans for the re-development of Brimscombe Port continue. Despite requests from Tenants to extend their occupancies, June's Strategy & Resources Committee authorised the Head of Asset Management to serve formal notifications on the Tenants, some of whom have been operating without a tenancy agreement.

These notices were served on the 1st July 2021 and the legal paperwork to present to the Courts for vacant possession is progressing. However, Rush Skate Park have ceased operations at Brimscombe on the 29th August and The Grace Network are very hopeful of finding a local and suitable building to operate from. SDC are helping to support both businesses in finding alternative sites and are working with other agencies to widen the scope. SDC have also put out several media requests, asking if anyone has a suitable building to offer. The urgency to vacate the site is driven by various engineering and ecological timescales, including an autumnal bat count, which if delayed, would seriously jeopardise the overall project, due to escalating building costs. Officers and members are working hard to find a developer to provide the 140+ 'affordable homes' that will be built on this site, at a cost of approx. £34m. Cllr Braun and the local Ward councillor, Beki Aldam, have been looking at wider ways to help, including appearing on BBC and ITV News. The initial infrastructure to recreating the 'port basin', including the 'port' itself, access roads and other portside building, will be completed by a specialist grounds work contractor, funded by SDC and others.

UBICO.

UBICO our refuse management partner (of which SDC is a shareholder) continues to do well collecting our district's waste and recycling. Despite problems with staff number during Covid, their collection rate is 98.6% on the day, and to help, we are financially supporting 'overtime' to ensure all collections are made as soon as possible. Fortunately, our HGV drivers have a dispensation on working hours during COVID, but a nationwide shortage of HGV drivers is not helping the situation.

Service updates on missed collections can be found here:

<https://www.stroud.gov.uk/environment/bins-rubbish-and-recycling/bins-and-recycling-containers/report-a-missed-bin-collection>

Fromebridge Roundabout (A38 Whitminster) and Ocean, Stonehouse.

Readers may recall that this important section of the Phase 1B Stroudwater Canal project, to connect the canal from Stonehouse to Saul Junction, was unexpectedly funded and then completed by Highways England in 2020, at a cost of £4m. During the hot weather, the 50m long lock has apparently been used by swimmers to practise their stokes. SDC are to discourage such 'training' by erecting signs. The lock can be seen at <https://www.google.com/maps/@51.7642487,-2.3316326,367m/data=!3m1!1e3!5m1!1e4>

The main rail line from Bristol to Gloucester crosses the Stroudwater Canal at Ocean, Stonehouse. However the bridge over the Canal is incompatible, so it is planned to replace it during the Xmas 2021 'shutdown'. The new bridge and supports are being fabricated alongside the canal, and like Fromebridge, the site is worth a visit. See <https://www.google.com/maps/@51.7437546,-2.2960947,682m/data=!3m1!1e3>

Development Control Committee - Ashen Plains. (NB meeting held 2nd September)

Following a wrongly announced declaration of delegated powers by SDC officers, the decision to allow the retrospective planning application was overturned by the High Court in July, which was directed to DCC, as was initially intended, for a member decision.

Cllr Tucker has been working with NNPC since 2019 on numerous issues in this location and attended the site visit of 10 members of the committee on the 31st August, ahead of last Thursday's DCC meeting. Your other District Councillors, Braun and James spoke elegantly against the officer's recommendation of approval, succinctly and forcefully supported by Cllr Larkin of NNPC and Cllr Symons. We were therefore delighted that the Committee over-ruled the officers, 5 votes to 2 and, following a final check by our legal team, a pre-prepared Enforcement Notice will now be issued requesting that the illegal 'Barn 2' be removed. This serving of the EN needs to be done with some expediency, as the time limit for enforcement is 4 years since erection and that was Jan 2018. Well done everyone!

Unauthorised Groundworks in Waterley Bottom (yet again!)

Following a visual siting and also complaints from local residents of large earthmoving at 'Galloway', Waterley Bottom, Cllr Tucker requested an immediate site visit from SDC's Enforcement Team. This was expedited the same day (1st August) and following 'discussions', the landowner(s) agreed to halt further works, except for some 'permitted rights' adjacent to a property. They were advised that planning permission was needed to cover works such as these and invited to do so. District Councillors and others are monitoring any developments.

Blackboy Clock Review

There has been local and national media interest in the review. The review is seeking to ensure statues and commemorations - including the Blackboy Clock in Stroud - as well as the names of

streets and buildings, are representative of local people's values and those of a modern, inclusive council.

A Review Panel made up of community representatives, councillors and historians will then review the results of the consultation and publish its recommendations based on the representations made. Possible outcomes include relocation, the addition of explanatory information, renaming or removal. In some cases, it may be decided that no action is necessary at all.

The consultation closed on 1 September. www.stroud.gov.uk/statuereview

Afghan Resettlement Scheme

As noted in Cllr Cohen's County Report, Stroud District Council is part of a countywide partnership, to resettle up to 35 Afghan families in the county. So far 7 properties have been offered to the Home Office. The Gloucestershire Housing Partnership continues to appeal to private-sector landlords who have good quality properties to rent to come forward. They are particularly in need of larger (4 or 5 bed) properties. Participation in the scheme brings a number of benefits for landlords. In addition to the GCC contact (Gorib.Hossain@gloucester.gov.uk.) there is also a national website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/afghanistan-housing-portal-offers-of-support>

Support for all Afghan families is to be coordinated by the local provider, GARAS (Gloucestershire Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers). This advice and assistance will cover employment, welfare benefits, housing, health, and education. The County Council is coordinating access to education, health services etc. Anyone wishing to volunteer or donate is encouraged to contact admin@garas.org.uk or via <https://www.garas.org.uk/>

Noise Abatement Notice non-compliance upheld

A resident from Stroud was served with a Noise Abatement Notice to address the playing of amplified music and gaming noise at high volumes from his property in Ebley, Stroud, which had regularly and unreasonably disturbed his neighbours. Despite the service of the Abatement Notice, evidence was subsequently gained of multiple instances of non-compliance affecting the neighbouring property, including during Covid lockdown periods. The resident, Mr Gregg Wootten, did not attend the original court hearing on 21 March and so a penalty was set without an opportunity to take his means and any mitigating circumstances into account. An appeal was heard on 30 July which upheld the original sentence of non-compliance with a Noise Abatement Notice and reduced the penalty from £5735 to a £1,000 fine, a £100 victim surcharge and a £500 contribution towards costs. A Forfeiture Order relating to noise-making equipment seized from Mr Wootten's property was not appealed and remains in place.

Road safety – local parish forum

Cllr Braun convened a meeting of interested local parish representatives to discuss Speed watch good practice and road safety issues on 29 July. Paul Helbrow, from Gloucestershire Highways and David Collicott from Gloucestershire Police also attended. Feedback has indicated that the meeting was useful and so it is proposed to hold quarterly information sharing meetings. Cllr Braun is working with County Cllr Linda Cohen to set up future meetings, with further information to follow in

September. Cllr Tucker will be working with the Stinchcombe road safety team, who will be carrying out speed checks in the village.

Climate & Ecological Emergency Bill

During August, Stroud District Council has been promoting its support for a new law to protect the future of life on earth: the Climate and Ecological Emergency Bill (CEE). This is a proposal drafted by scientists, legal experts, ecological economists and environmentalists, designed specifically to reverse climate and ecological breakdown. The Bill requires the UK to take responsibility for its fair share of greenhouse gas emissions, to actively restore biodiverse habitats, and to stop damaging our natural world through the production, transportation and disposal of the goods we consume. It was tabled in Parliament by Caroline Lucas MP (Green), and now has the support of 110 MPs across 8 political parties, representing England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

SDC Environment Committee Chair, Chloe Turner commented that SDC is one of eighty two councils across the country which is supporting the CEE Bill.

People can join the campaign as an individual to get involved and support the Bill:

https://www.ceebill.uk/join_the_campaign

Sports kit requested

As children go back to school, an appeal has been made for sports kit which they have grown out of. Organisations across the district are taking part in BBC's 'Kit out the Nation' campaign. It's a month long Make a Difference campaign running from Saturday 4th September to 2nd October. It aims to take in and distribute unwanted, good condition sports kit and sports clothing and deliver to children and teenagers who need it most.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee published a report on 29th July 2021 where they said data from Sport England showing 100,000 fewer children met the recommended level of activity in 2020 than in 2019 was "of significant concern".

Local organisations which are taking part include:

- The Pulse, Dursley
- GL11 community Hub, Cam
- The Keepers Community Hub, Wotton

Kit can be dropped off at any of these locations during the campaign. Each organisation should be updating their website to show when you can drop off the kit. We will be linking with business2schools to help with the distribution of the kit.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/1RvmVJyvX0PYv2vxG4rRbQS/kit-out-the-nation>

Council offices open to the public – by appointment only

The SDC offices at Ebley Mill are once again open to the public – but in order to remain Covid compliant, people must make an appointment before coming to reception. Anyone who does so will be asked to contact Customer Services via phone or email. The council offices have been made safe

with additional screens, fewer people and pre-booked appointments only. Residents are encouraged to continue to do as much as they can online or over the phone for safety.