

Stroud District Councillors' Report – March 2024

Report of meetings during February 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

Housing Committee – 6th February

New homes for Afghan and Ukrainian refugees – Noted that the district council has bid for further money from the Local Authority Housing Fund to part-fund (40%) of the purchase cost of homes for people who have arrived in the UK, via the Ukrainian and Afghan resettlement and relocation schemes. The properties purchased will be added to the council housing stock, and will then be available to any households in housing need, once they are no longer required by refugees. The remaining cost of the house purchase will be funded by borrowing, from the Housing Revenue Account.

From previous rounds of this fund, Stroud DC has so far purchased 16 properties. A sale is agreed and due to be completed for five additional properties by the end of March. This means that £2.49m has been secured by the council to part fund the purchase of these properties. The latest grant in January, resulted from a short notice request from the Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities, due to underspend on the fund. It is difficult for councils which do not manage their own housing stock to find the match funding required.

District Heating and Independent Living Charges – amendments to the fees and charges set out in the December 2023 budget setting papers was agreed.

Domestic Abuse Policy – agreed to support this policy which is to ensure support and a sensitive approach to housing solutions for victims of domestic abuse.

New Legionella Policy – approved in line with new reporting requirements and standards from the Social Housing Regulator. The Housing Committee as the Governing body for the Council's Housing Service.

Swedish Timber Houses – Committee supported the proposed options for each site.

- Refurbish the smaller sites: Miserden, Bushy Beeches, The Camp and North Nibley, Barrs Lane.
- Redevelop the larger sites: Wotton-under-Edge, Mount Pleasant; Stinchcombe, The Avenue; Uley, The Knoll.

The report notes that in Stinchcombe, tenants and residents would prefer the properties to be refurbished. In Wotton there was a mixed response from tenants and residents. In North Nibley there is support for refurbishment.

At the larger sites in Uley, Stinchcombe and Wotton, there is potential to significantly increase the numbers of units at each site, making redevelopment (subject to planning) a realistic option. However, all three sites

are likely to involve buying private houses and contact has only recently been made with some of these owners. More work also needs to be done to explore funding options and in particular testing different layouts at the Knoll, Uley. Further consultation with ward councillors and the respective Town and Parish Councils is also needed. A further report recommending options for the potential redevelopment sites will be brought back to Committee in March

Changes to the regulation of social housing – update on the preparations that are underway at Stroud District Council in response to the regulatory changes resulting from the Social Housing Regulation Act, which come into force in April 2024. This act requires four new standards:

- The Safety and Quality Standard requires landlords to provide safe and good quality homes and landlord services to tenants.
- The Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard requires landlords to be open with tenants and treat them with fairness and respect so that tenants can access services, raise complaints when necessary, influence decision making and hold their landlord to account.
- The Neighbourhood and Community Standard requires landlords to engage with other relevant parties so that tenants can live in safe and well-maintained neighbourhoods and feel safe in their homes.
- The Tenancy Standard sets requirements for the fair allocation and letting of homes and for how those tenancies are managed and ended by landlords.

A Housing Improvement Group chaired by the Strategic Director, has been established to monitor priority projects and service performance across the four regulatory standards, including the project management of regulatory preparations.

Housing Service Review – following consultation with staff, a new staffing structure for the tenancy management service will take effect in March. Housing Officers previously had to manage around 900 homes each which was difficult to sustain. The new structure involves a focus on resident engagement and more cross team working with the creation of new Housing Assistant roles to support the wider team.

Council 22nd February

Council approved the following reports:

- **Treasury Management** Strategy, Annual Investment Strategy And Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement 2024/25
- **Council Tax Support** Schemes for 2024/25 were confirmed as follows:
 - o 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.
 - o A new Council Tax **Premium on second homes** will apply from 01 April 2025
 - o 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.
 - o The Council Tax **Discount for Care Leavers** will extend the qualifying age from 21 to 24 and include care leavers from outside of Gloucestershire.

- **Capital Strategy** for the council
- **General Fund Budget 2024/25**, Capital Programme and Medium-Term Financial Plan

Council press releases contain the highlights of the budget:

- Investment in community projects in the new SDC budget
<https://www.stroud.gov.uk/news-archive/investment-in-community-projects-agreed-in-the-new-sdc-budget>
- Car parking charges frozen again in 85% of spaces in Stroud:
<https://www.stroud.gov.uk/news-archive/car-parking-charges-frozen-again-in-85-of-spaces>
- **Housing Revenue Account – revised budget** and Medium Term Financial Plan
- **Civic Timetable** – setting out meeting dates for the civic year from May 2024 to April 2025 was approved.

Development Control Committee – 27th February

- **Land At Sharpness Docks**, The Docks, Sharpness, Gloucestershire S.17/0798/OUT
Mixed use development which includes up to 300 dwellings (C3), industrial and distribution development (B1c,B2,B8) on 6.6 hectares of land 2 no. marinas, up to 1250m2 of ancillary retail / food and drink uses (A1,A2,A3 and A4) up to 7,000m2 of commercial floor space (B1 office/light industrial of which no more than 4300m2 to be B1 office), up to 100 holiday lodges/camping pitches, hotel, public open space, landscaping, visitor parking, new access road and associated infrastructure. All matters reserved.
Permission refused.
- **A T C Loudspeaker Technology Ltd**, Gypsy Lane, Chalford, Stroud S.23/1250/FUL
Redevelopment and expansion of existing employment site with new bespoke buildings, new access points and associated parking, landscaping, biodiversity enhancements and associated works.
Permission granted.
- **Stroudwater Canal Phase 1B**, Eastington, Gloucestershire, S.19/0291/FUL
Reinstatement of the 'Missing Mile' section of the Stroudwater Navigation and development of associated infrastructure including locks, mooring basin, car parking, cafe and leisure facilities building with combined office and residence for basin manager.
Permission granted.

Cotswold Canals Connected Project

The planning decision by the Development Control Committee marks a big step forward for canal restoration and means reinstatement of the missing section of canal that was filled in during the construction of the M5 motorway in the 1960's, can go ahead. This will include the construction of a new canal channel from John Robinson (Westfield) Lock at Eastington near Westfield Bridge to connect with the

new channel already constructed at the A38 roundabout. The scheme in Eastington covers both sides of the M5 and includes a towpath with new pedestrian bridge, a new mooring basin with space for 44 non-residential moorings, and a two-storey building including café and canal basin manager's accommodation.

Since Stroud District Council and Cotswold Canals Trust took on leadership of the project in 2008, 7.5 km of canal between Stroud and Stonehouse has been restored, transforming the route into a peaceful walking and cycling alternative to the busy adjacent A419, and created a vibrant new water habitat for nature. The route diverts away from the historic route of the canal, as this original route has been built on at the motorway junction, highway depot and A38 roundabout and link road. The new canal channel diverts south from Westfield bridge before going under the motorway, sharing the existing River Frome underpass with a dividing wall which will act as a flood barrier.

Key partners in the project include Gloucestershire County Council, Canal & River Trust and Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, plus charities including Cotswold Boatmobility. Canal restoration has made access to the water easier for a wider section of the community, and seen the successful staging of talks and events including The Lock Challenge. Work on the Missing Mile has been scheduled into the engineering programme and will commence later this year in line with the planning conditions.

A significant proportion of the works on both the Missing Mile and other sections of the canal will be volunteer-led projects. Cotswold Canals Trust is currently scaling up its restoration volunteer teams with the skills, equipment and resources required to deliver this project.

Anyone interested in volunteering on this historic project to restore the Stroudwater Navigation can find out more at cotswoldcanals.org/volunteer/volunteering-opportunities/

This project would not be possible without the work of volunteers and the generous support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, National Highways, public grants, charitable trusts, corporate sponsorship, legacies and private donations. Progress can also be followed at www.facebook.com/cotswoldcanalstrust/ and www.facebook.com/cotswoldcanalsconnected





Images credit: YouTube - Court Above the Cut

Strategy & Resources Committee – 1st February

As noted in last month's report, the Committee considered the following papers for further approval by council on 22nd February:

- District Council budget for 2024/25.
- Council tax schemes from April 2024

Other reports

- **Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)** - Spending allocations for 2024/2025 were approved. This funding supports additional demand placed on local infrastructure created by new housing growth, in accordance with adopted planning policy. Following a recommendation from the Environment Committee, £1.2 m has been allocated to seven projects:
 - o Standish multi-user path – Gloucestershire County Council: £400,000.
 - o New entrance/reception/office at Gastrells Community Primary School - Gloucestershire County Council: £228,000.
 - o Berkeley Town Improvement Plan (detailed design) – Berkeley Town Council: £200,000.
 - o Berkeley Community Hub – Berkeley Books: £170,000.
 - o Stroud Merrywalks Interchange Hub - Gloucestershire County Council: £98,000.
 - o Stroud Subscription Rooms' new catering kitchen and toilets – Subscription Rooms Trust: £66,759.
 - o Sustainable drainage for water quality and habitat at Stratford Park – Stroud District Council: £45,852.
- **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 (now £12.00 per hour). The Government requires Apprentices to be paid £5.28 per hour however the council rate for apprentices is more generous, as it is based on the National Minimum Wage for 18-20yr olds of £7.49. Excluding the apprentice grade, the pay ratio between the highest and lowest employees of the council is 1:6.
- **Corporate Asset Management Plan.** The plan includes action plans for all the assets of the council, such as 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. ([Link to paper.](#)) Officers will engage with the towns, Chamber of Trade and other stakeholders. 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. 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.

Other news

Low-income families urged to check whether they could get help to buy food and milk

Almost 200 low-income families in the Stroud district are missing out on financial support which would help them buy healthy food, milk and vitamins.

The NHS Healthy Start scheme is available to people who are more than 10 weeks pregnant or have a child under four and receive qualifying benefits, and anyone who is under 18 and more than 10 weeks pregnant. It can be used to buy fresh, frozen, and tinned fruit and vegetables, fresh, dried and tinned pulses, plain cow's milk and infant formula. Healthy Start vitamins for pregnant and breastfeeding women and vitamin drops for children under four years old are also included in the scheme.

According to data 187 people in the Stroud district that are eligible for the scheme have not applied.

You can find out if you are eligible on the NHS Healthy Start website www.healthystart.nhs.uk or by emailing healthy.start@nhsbsa.nhs.uk or phoning 0300 330 7010. Successful applicants will receive a discreet, prepaid card which can be used in any shop that sells healthy food and accepts Mastercard.

The card will be topped up every four weeks to a value of:

- £4.25 each week of your pregnancy from the 10th week
- £8.50 each week for children from birth to one year old
- £4.25 each week for children between one and four years old

For other sources of support see www.stroud.gov.uk/costofliving

Community groups can contribute to a video snapshot of Stroud district

The diversity, community, and inclusivity at the heart of the Stroud district is set to be celebrated in a new short film – and community groups are welcome to take part.

“Our District Lives” will create a snapshot of the many and diverse communities of the Stroud district and feature as many different community organisations or groups as possible.

The project is the result of work by the Council's Community Representation Taskforce which was established following the review of street names, monuments and buildings across the district. The Taskforce is made up of recruited community representatives who have been working together to develop a project which demonstrates and celebrates Stroud district as a welcoming and inclusive place to live, work and visit.

As an added bonus, the final videos will provide community groups with a resource to help promote their group and increase their membership. The film as a whole will be published online and launched with a premiere at Stroud District Council's Ebley Mill offices before being shown throughout the district.

The project looks to include teams, committees, musical groups, community action groups and any other group that meet these criteria. The project is especially keen to hear from groups giving a voice and presence to those who feel marginalised or underrepresented in all aspects of our communities, interests and areas.

The deadline for applications is Friday, 15th March. To apply, please complete this short submission form: <https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/DM8R1L/>

National Apprenticeship Week

Stroud District Council's apprentices are showcased their talents during National Apprenticeship Week (5-11 February) by taking over SDC's social media channels. Stroud District Council currently has 12 apprentices in a variety of roles – from working in the finance department to plumbing and carpentry, developing a range of on-the-job skills and experience.

SDC has been recognised for the contribution it makes to apprentices and won the Gloucestershire Live Apprenticeship Employer of the Year award in 2020. Cirencester College is the educational provider for apprenticeships at SDC. Apprentices receive one-to-one coaching and workshops tailored to their position, helping them achieve key skills, knowledge and behaviours in their chosen field.

Find out more about apprenticeships and National Apprenticeship Week at: <https://www.apprenticeships.gov.uk> and check www.stroud.gov.uk/jobs-and-training/jobs-with-the-council for apprenticeship opportunities.

Revamped play area opens

A playground in Cambridge Avenue Dursley has been upgraded and extended and now has a new surface and new multi-use piece of equipment made using recycled materials. Although the official opening in February was marked by rain, it didn't dampen the enthusiasm of the most important guests – local children who continued to play despite the downpour.

The play area is one of six throughout the district to be revamped by Stroud District Council. Five - Acacia Drive and Cambridge Avenue in Dursley, Wharfdale Way in Stonehouse, Archway Gardens in Paganhill and Mason Road and Stratford Park in Stroud.