

Stroud District Councillors' Report – January 2024

Report of meetings during December 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 – 5th December

Affordable Homes at Brimscombe Port - Committee approved the purchase of the affordable homes at Brimscombe Port, from St Modwen Homes, as part of the delivery of the redevelopment project. The Council has first refusal on the affordable homes, which will make up 30% of the homes on the development, with half being for shared ownership and half for rent. The current estimate of the cost of this acquisition is £7.5 m, with the final figures to be calculated once planning permission has been granted. The subsidy needed to bring the purchase forward (which is the difference between the cost of the purchase, less the capital receipts from the shared ownership sales and any borrowing that can be paid off from the associated rental income) is to be requested from Homes England as grant funding.

Pledging accommodation for refugees The Government is asking Local Authorities to pledge how many migrant households, arriving in the UK via safe and legal routes, can be housed by each Local Authority in 2025. The aggregate figure will then be used by Government to cap the number of migrants allowed to enter the UK. The Committee agreed to provide a maximum of two council houses in the short term, but this will be regularly reviewed.

Rents for 2024/25 and finance reports Committee discussed this year's outturn position against the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) revenue budgets and Housing Capital Programme. They also considered the Medium Term Financial Plan (2023/24 – 2027/28) and budget for the next financial year. Committee agreed that social and affordable rents will increase by 7.7% in line with national rent guidance. Garage rents and landlord service charges will increase by the same amount. Independent Living Scheme charges and district heating charges will increase by different rates (see [item 9](#)).

Tenant Support Fund – Committee agreed to set up a new fund to support SDC housing tenants who are experiencing financial hardship linked to the cost of living crisis. A budget of £200k has already been confirmed. Payments awarded through this fund will be restricted to one payment per financial year, up to a maximum of £1,500.

Swedish Timber Houses – The Council owns 21 Swedish timber properties across the district. They were acquired as part of a support package to address the housing crisis after the Second World War and were bought by the Government from Sweden. They had a design life of 60 years and now require major investment to bring them up to modern energy efficiency and quality standards. Further work is being undertaken on the cost/benefits of the options being considered, along with local consultation. Housing Committee will consider a recommendation in February 2024 for each location. ([report](#) and [list](#) of properties: in the parishes of Bisley, Painswick, Miserden, North Nibley, Wotton-under-Edge, Stinchcombe, Uley).

New Homes Programme ([link](#)). There are 54 new council homes to be built in the current approved programme by 2025, in Cam (23 homes), Dursley (13), Wotton (Glos St / Bradley St – 8 homes, Symn Lane development – 3 homes), and Cashes Green (7). Unfortunately, following a significant amount of work, the tender process to appoint a new contractor resulted in an unsuccessful award and subsequent

abandonment of the process. The financial standing of the highest scoring contractor changed just prior to awarding the contract which left the council with an unacceptable level of risk and following legal advice the council will re-tender using a different framework. This will delay work at the new sites in Wotton, Cam and Dursley. Further information on the likely timescale for construction will be shared at the February Committee meeting.

SDC is in the process of acquiring 3 'Section 106' homes in Wotton-under-Edge at the Symn Lane development. The exchange of contracts has been delayed as a result of outstanding works due by the contractor. Following exchange of contracts completion will take place 5 weeks later. It is currently forecast that these homes will form part of the housing stock by the end of this financial year. This acquisition will provide 2 affordable rented homes and 1 shared ownership property which will be marketed upon exchange of contracts.

The New Homes team are currently reviewing opportunities for the future Programme and have assessed sites in Painswick, Leonard Stanley, Paganhill, Stone, Chalford, Stonehouse, Dursley and Thrupp.

Environment Committee – 7th December

The meeting opened with numerous public questions in relation to various aspects of anti-social behaviour, in particular litter and other ASB along the canal.

Ubico Annual Presentation - Annual update from the Managing Director at Ubico, after another successful year of partnership with the council. Ubico collects the district's household recycling, food, residual waste and garden waste, alongside other environmental services such as street cleaning and grounds maintenance.

Finance reports – Committee reviewed the quarterly budget report and draft estimates for 2024/25 and was satisfied with the reports. There is a mix of new pressures and savings, in particular relating to movements on the recycling markets and the fact that there is now finally government guidance on future recycling plans.

Cotswold Natural Landscape – The 2023-2035 Cotswold National Landscape (our local AONB) Management Plan was noted. This new Plan and its vision place increased emphasis on the climate and ecological emergencies as well as access to nature and the countryside. The evidence within the Plan and the policies will assist in decision making and the preparation of Council policies and projects.

CIL Funding recommendations – Committee recommended to Strategy & Resources Committee (meeting on 1st February) that seven Community Infrastructure Levy funding bids, totalling just over £1.2m, be approved. These are for projects as follows:

- Sustainable Drainage for Water Quality & habitat improvement at Stratford Park
- Stroud Subscription Rooms new catering kitchen and toilets
- Berkeley Community Hub
- Berkeley Town Improvement Plan - Detailed Design
- Standish Multi-User Path Construction
- New entrance/reception/office area, Gastrells Community Primary School, Rodborough.
- Stroud Merrywalks Bus station improvements.

All 7 successful bids were of a high quality, meeting the CIL strategic infrastructure criteria (in particular, addressing pressures arising from housing growth) ([link](#))

One bid, for a new car park at Tinkley Gate, Nympsfield, was unsuccessful because it didn't meet CIL criteria, but officers will work with the National Trust on various other ways that the Council may support

aspects of that project. Over £600k of collected CIL funds is retained for future projects – SDC has already received Expressions of Interest from partners including the County Council for many times that amount.

Management of open spaces on new residential developments – Committee approved a series of actions in response to the Council Motion (20 July 2023) to explore potential options and approaches concerning the management of open spaces and amenities on new residential developments.

Various information reports were received: Strategic Planning Advisory Board, Stroud Regeneration Committee, Performance Monitoring, Climate Leadership Group, Stroud Canal Company, UK100 Statement of Shared Intent.

Council meeting – 14th December

Motion On Council Support For The Extension Of The Franchise - Proposed by Cllr Steve Hynd (Green) and seconded by Cllr George James (Liberal Democrat). Agreed that the Chief Executive will write to Government requesting that the franchise for local elections be extended in England and Northern Ireland to all qualifying foreign nationals in line with eligibility criteria in Scotland and Wales. This would ensure a UK-wide and fair approach so that all our residents who are also our council tax payers are enfranchised. The Council will also continue promoting voter registration and photo ID requirements to residents. For more information see the campaign on Residence Based Voting Rights ([link](#)).

Approval of recommendations from other committees - Council agreed to support the following:

- Implementing a new Community Funding (Crowdfunding) scheme in 2024.
- Extension of the SDC car park at Marybrook Street, Berkeley.
- Allocation of housing for refugees in 2025.

Review of Polling District, Polling Places and Polling Stations 2023 - Council agreed to approve the schedule of polling districts and polling places following a recent review ([link – agenda item 10](#)).

Updates to the Constitution – Council agreed amendments as recommended by the Constitution Working Group.

Licensing Sub-Committee - 15th December

The Sub-Committee considered an application for a new Tesco Express store located in a unit in the Five Valleys Shopping Centre. The application was for a premises licence to permit sales of alcohol and late-night refreshment. It was decided to grant a premises licence. In respect of the application for the sale of alcohol (for consumption off the premises) concerns were noted about current and possible increased anti-social behaviour linked to the sale of alcohol for consumption off the premises. The licence will be subject to a condition that a CCTV system is put in place, and that the 'Challenge 25' scheme be adopted so that any customer attempting to purchase alcohol who appears to be under the age of 25 shall be asked for photographic ID.

Local Plan Review

Stroud District Council is working with local partners, and has provided further information to the Planning Inspectors, for the examination of the draft Local Plan for Stroud district.

A further letter was received from the Planning Inspectors on 18th December. This is much more positive about the prospects for the draft Local Plan. The Inspectors have again requested further information from Stroud DC (by 19th January) before they take a decision on whether to grant a 6 month (or longer) pause in the examination in public process for the plan. All the information can be found in the Examination Library:

[link](#). The Conservative Group have called an Extraordinary Council Meeting to discuss the Local Plan, set for 25th January.

Other issues

Rural England Prosperity Fund - grant funding available

Applications are still open for small rural businesses, community organisations, parish & town councils in Stroud district to apply for a share of a £400,000 fund.

Stroud District Council has been awarded £100,000 for 2023-24 and £300,000 for 2024-25 by the Government's Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF).

Eligible organisations can apply for grant of £3,000 - £20,000. The funding is for capital projects and must be spent on lasting assets such as a building or equipment. In most cases 60% match funding will be required. For more information see: www.stroud.gov.uk/REPF

Company fined for smoke emissions

The operator of an animal incinerator site has been fined for non-compliance with the requirements of its Environmental Permit. Time Right of Limekiln Farm, Lypiatt entered a guilty plea to three charges by Stroud District Council alleging a failure by the company to use the best available techniques at the site to control its emissions to air. On occasions, thick plumes of dark and black smoke were emitted from the site in contravention of permit conditions.

At a sentencing hearing at Cheltenham Magistrates' Court on 14 December 2023, Time Right was fined £50,000 for these non-compliances – full costs and a victim surcharge raised the total penalty to £64,489. Installations operating under a relevant Environmental Permit are inspected by members of the Environmental Protection team at Stroud District Council. Where non-compliance is identified, officers will always work to address those issues with the company as a matter of priority and, where appropriate, undertake enforcement action.

Tributes to District Councillor Norman Kay

Councillors from across the political spectrum have paid tribute to Councillor Norman Kay who died on 12 December, aged 77. Cllr Kay represented Nailsworth and Horsley, and had been recovering in hospital from heart surgery in September. Cllr Kay was elected to Stroud District Council six times, first in 1983, serving a total of 21 years as a district councillor initially as a Labour member then in later years as a Green. He also served on Nailsworth Town Council for 14 years including three as mayor. There will not be a by-election for the vacancy, as it occurred within 6 months of the local elections. All SDC seats will be up for election on 2nd May.