**Stroud District Councillors’ Report – May 2024**

Report of meetings during April 2024

*All Stroud District Council and Committee papers can be found here:*[*https://www.stroud.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/meetings*](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-TShcYlM8Stweg*](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCeH_AmF0s-TShcYlM8Stweg)

**Elections**

Elections were held on Thursday 2nd May for Stroud District Council, the Police & Crime Commission for Gloucestershire and for the seven parish and town council wards which were contested (due to more candidates being nominated than places on the council).

The election results for Stroud District Council: 22 Green Councillors, 20 Labour councillors, 7 Conservative Councillors and 2 Liberal Democrat Councillors.

Conservative Chris Nelson was re-elected as the Police and Crime Commissioner.

**Council meeting – 25th April**

A long meeting which covered numerous items:

**M5 Junction 14 – Work on design and costing of junction improvements**

Council approved a budget of up to £100k for to pay for consultancy work on design and costings for improvements to Junction 14 of the M5.

The Planning Inspectors examining the draft Local Plan for Stroud District have stated that this is a requirement for the Local Plan Examination to continue. National Highways have noted that the existing junction arrangement at J14 is operating at capacity and an improvement is required to accommodate housing growth in the area.

The draft Local Plan Examination is currently in a ten month pause to undertake several tasks as set out in a Joint Action Plan, as agreed with Gloucestershire County Council, South Gloucestershire Council and National Highways and the work on Junction 14 is one of the tasks.

The costings and design work will start with existing work previously undertaken by South Gloucestershire Council and National Highways. SDC has already approved additional funding to work jointly with Gloucestershire County Council on improvements to Junction 12 of the M5, which is another part of the Joint Action Plan required by the Planning Inspectors.

Design and costing of improvements to a junction is only the first step in the process, and additional work would need to be completed, and national level funding secured by National Highways to deliver any future junction improvements.

**Appointment of a Monitoring Officer** (Council Legal Officer)

Hayley Sims is appointed to replace Claire Hughes with effect from 1 May 2024 for an initial period of one year. Claire has secured a full-time role as a Director at Cheltenham Borough Council. Hayley was previously the Deputy Monitoring Officer. Hayley has lots of experience as a local government lawyer and will be employed by SDC via the One Legal partnership (SDC is a member of the partnership). Hayley will work part time for Stroud DC as monitoring officer (2.5 days per week) and the rest of the week as a senior lawyer, specialising in Commercial and Property at One Legal.

**Stroud District Council Organisational Changes**

Following Claire’s departure as a Strategic Director, her other roles at Stroud DC (not related to the Monitoring Officer function) are being shared out amongst existing staff. This includes the Data Protection Officer role and responsibility for Corporate Governance. Council also agreed that a Deputy Chief Executive will be appointed from the three remaining strategic directors.

**Gloucestershire City Region Board**

Council agreed to the establishment of the new board, the Gloucestershire City Region Board (GCRB) which will replace the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Joint Committee. This board is the public forum for all the Gloucestershire local authorities to work together. It also serves to administer the Strategic Economic Development Fund (SEDF) which is a Gloucestershire-wide fund set up from the Business Rates Pool.

**County ‘Devolution Deal’**

The Government is expected to announce soon that a ‘County Deal’ has been agreed for Gloucestershire and some other authorities. There is very limited impact expected of this so-called ‘devolution deal’ on Stroud District Council. The main change is that the adult education budget (of approximately £10m) will be transferred from central Government to Gloucestershire County Council to administer. The deal also gives the county council strategic oversight of the Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), and provides land assembly and compulsory purchase powers, which are shared between the local planning authority, county council and Homes England.

Council agreed to support a Memorandum of Understanding about this deal, which confirms that existing funding allocated under the UK Shared Prosperity Fund will continue to be administered by Stroud DC, and that in relation to any work on land assembly or Compulsory Purchase Orders, the County Council would seek the agreement of the relevant district council prior to working on land assembly in their area.

**Council motion on managing contaminated land**

The motion proposed by Cllr Beki Aldam (Green) and seconded by Cllr Chloe Turner (Green) concerns support for dealing with contaminated land. The Council will write to the Government to request the funding and resources necessary for the efficient undertaking of the proposed principles of ‘Zane’s Law’. This seeks to address the crisis of contaminated land in the UK, reinstating legislative provisions removed by successive governments from the 1990 Environment Protection Act, and to increase national government funding and support to local authorities to manage contaminated land.

**Swedish Timber Houses – Redevelopment Sites**

Following the decision by Housing Committee to progress redevelopment of three sites, in Stinchcombe, Uley and Wotton, the Council agreed to the additional budget required to finance the redevelopment to deliver new council owned, energy efficient, affordable housing. The redevelopment would still be subject to obtaining planning permission, and a further report to Housing Committee. Copies of the draft layouts can be found here ([item 8a](https://stroud.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=143&MId=1424&Ver=4))

**Visitors Car Park Ebley Mill**

Following the committee recommendation, council agreed to change the visitors only car park at Ebley Mill to a public (charging) car park. This is being undertaken in response to requests from local residents and

businesses to access the car park.

**Cotswold Canals Connected Project Update**

Good progress is being made on the environment and community programmes of the project with a plan of further works for 2024. By December 2025 an additional section of the canal from Stonehouse to Eastington is expected to be completed. The final phase to connect the Stroudwater canal to the national network at Saul Junction is unlikely to happen before the end of 2027 as additional funding needs to be secured for two infrastructure aspects: the GCC owned road bridge (Walk Bridge) and the crossing under the M5 (working with National Highways). Restoration of the canal will bring significant environmental, community and economic benefits to the local area.

**Other items approved by Council**:

* Ubico Five Year Vision and Business Plan 2024/25
* Updates to the Constitution as proposed by the Constitution Working Group

**Development Control Committee – 9th April**

* Javelin Park, Bath Road, Haresfield, Stonehouse S.21/2579/OUT
Hybrid planning application for employment development for B8 (Storage or Distribution) Uses, ancillary offices, energy centre, landscaping, fitness trail and amenity areas and new access.

i. Outline for whole site (with all matters reserved except access) – Permitted
ii. Full application for Units 1, 2 for B8 (Storage or Distribution) Uses and the energy centre (all matters submitted). **Permitted**

* Former Orchestra Works Site, Walk Mill Lane, Kingswood, Wotton-Under-Edge S.22/2473/FUL
Demolition of Orchestra Works and Associated Buildings, and development of no.32 new Zero Carbon dwellings, access from Walk Mill Lane, highways, open space, landscaping, drainage, and associated infrastructure. **Permitted**
* Land Off, School Lane, Whitminster, Gloucestershire S.21/0236/OUT
Residential development (up to 100 dwellings), associated infrastructure, ancillary facilities, open space and landscaping. Construction of a new vehicular access off School Lane. **Refused**
* Land Off, School Lane, Whitminster, Gloucestershire S.22/0423/OUT (Pages 191 - 228) Residential development (up to 45 dwellings), associated infrastructure, ancillary facilities, open space and landscaping. Construction of a new vehicular access off School Lane. **Permitted.**

Planning and Enforcement Key Performance Indicators were noted. This data provides application number and performance statistics up to February 2024. The report shows the numbers of planning applications received and the percentage of applications determined against government targets. Information on enforcement statistics and notices issued is also included.

**Audit & Standards Committee – 16th April**

**Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit Report**

The Head of Service of the Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit forms part of the core Multi-Agency Approach to Fraud (MAAF) group. The core group consists of attendees from Gloucestershire Constabulary Economic Crime Team, Trading Standards, Victim Support, NHS and colleagues from Gloucester City and County Councils. The MAAF has been set up to discuss fraud trends, victim care and communication of fraud scams across Gloucestershire. Through collaborative working the main purpose is to raise awareness to minimise and disrupt fraud. A new website is being set up to be accessible to residents and council staff to provide guidance and advice on fraud. It aims to educate communities and help to reduce the stigma and increase reporting.

As previously reported, matches from the fraud initiative work relating to 2021/22 data sets, resulted in increased Council Tax revenue of £142,959 and 74 Civil Penalties, totalling £5,180, being applied.

The Unit continues to support the Council in tackling tenancy fraud. The overall remit is to prevent, detect and deter abuse of public funds and social housing. Housing and tenancy fraud remains as one of the top four areas of fraud and abuse within the public sector. This takes many forms but the two most significant areas are Right to Buy and Illegal Subletting.

**Draft Internal Audit Plan**

The draft plan for 2024-25 was shared with the Committee ([link](https://stroud.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s12351/Item%2013%20-%20Appendix%20A.pdf)) which sets out priorities and assurance requirements for the year ahead.

**Internal Audit Progress Update Report 2023-24**

The Council’s Internal Audit service is provided by Audit Risk Assurance (ARA) under a Shared Service agreement between Gloucestershire County Council, Stroud District Council and Gloucester City Council. An assurance level of substantial or acceptable was given for the audits undertaken up to October 2023.

**Other reports**

The Committee notes or approved the following documents:

* Information Governance Framework
* Safeguarding Audit - Management Update
* Counter Fraud and Anti-Corruption Policy
* Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit Fraud Risk Strategy
* Corporate Risk Register Update
* External Audit Plan for year ended 31 March 2024
* Treasury Management Quarter 3 Report
* Internal Audit Plan
* Update on Annual Governance Statement Action Plan

**Other news**

**No Mow May**

Stroud District Council will be leaving almost 100,000 square metres of grass uncut as part of the national environmental campaign No Mow May and is hoping residents will follow its lead. In the council’s latest resident survey, 82% of people in the Stroud district said they were in support of No Mow May.

The national campaign, led by charity Plantlife, encourages grass to grow and wildflowers to bloom during May, which in turn enhances and protects wildlife and cuts carbon emissions.

The council is responsible for approximately 90 square kilometres of maintained grassland in parks, housing estates, closed cemeteries and on roadside verges which it cuts on behalf of Gloucestershire County Council. By leaving a proportion uncut, grassland will flourish, encouraging the growth of wildflowers - a valuable food source for pollinators - and providing shelter for invertebrates, small mammals, and reptiles.

Further measures to enhance wildlife in the district were set at an Environment Committee meeting on 21 March when it was agreed that new initiatives would have a positive impact on at least 25% of the council’s total grassland. These include reducing the frequency of cutting grass around the base of the council’s 1,500 trees to once a year to improve the health of trees and create an additional 18,000 square metres of wildlife habitat.

Spring bulbs and wildflower seeds will be planted at the base of trees to aerate the soil and increase biodiversity and further opportunities to cut grass less frequently will be assessed throughout the year, with new areas of wildflower meadows being created.

**Support available to schools to encourage healthy eating**

Stroud District Council is appealing for schools in the Stroud district that have a high percentage of pupils that have free school meals to apply for free-of-charge teachers’ food education training. The council has successfully bid for funding from NHS Charities Together to finance the professional training by food educators TastEd for teachers and support staff.

TastEd will provide one hour of training and resources to enable teaching staff to deliver a range of taste education lessons that are closely tailored to the National Curriculum. The sessions help to demystify food education by using a simple and effective training model that has been shown to help children have a positive relationship with food as they try, talk, and write about food.

The lessons are highly engaging and provide children with positive experiences of fruit and vegetables in the safety of the classroom. Educators have found that, when surrounded by their peers, children will often try, and enjoy, a wide variety of new foods.

Research shows that 79% of children in the UK eat fewer than 3.5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day, with one in four children eating three or more unhealthy snacks a day. Teachers at Cam Everland school who took part in TastEd training reported that the experience was: “very interesting,” “gave me different ideas I hadn’t thought of,” and the programme as “simple but effective.”

**SDC can fund three schools** to receive a training session, and would particularly like to receive applications from schools with a high percentage of pupils who receive free school meals, or those which would like to focus on providing more food education.

Interested schools can apply for the training by contacting David Rawlings, Stroud District Council’s Children & Young People Development Officer at david.rawlings@stroud.gov.uk

More information about TastEd can be found at [www.tasteeducation.com](http://www.tasteeducation.com/?utm_medium=email&utm_name=&utm_source=govdelivery)

**Leisure centre and museum closures in May**

Three Stroud District Council-owned public buildings will close for a short time in May to as part of the installation of a renewable heating system.

Stratford Park Leisure Centre in Stroud will close on Monday 13 May and Friday 24 May, The Pulse Leisure Centre in Dursley will close on Thursday 16 and Friday 17 May and The Museum in the Park in Stroud will close from Tuesday 14 May to Friday 17 May, and Friday 24 May.

The £5 million project is replacing ageing gas boilers with state-of-the-art renewable heating systems. Most of the work at the centres has taken place behind the scenes with no impact to visitors. However, the final phase will cause considerable disruption to public areas with the loss of mains power, therefore cannot take place while the buildings are open to the public.

The closures have been planned so one leisure centre will be open every day with swimming, gym and exercise classes. There are public transport links between Stroud and Dursley with buses 65 (Stagecoach) and 65a (Cotswold Green) travelling between the two towns daily from Monday to Saturday. Leisure centre and museum members have been contacted about the closures.

Once complete, the project will save hundreds of tonnes of carbon emissions every year from the three buildings. Read more about the project here [www.stroud.gov.uk/salix](http://www.stroud.gov.uk/salix?utm_medium=email&utm_name=&utm_source=govdelivery)