

Stroud District Councillor Report – October 2021 covering SDC matters during September

All Stroud District Council and Committee papers can be found here:
<https://www.stroud.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/meetings>

New Council Plan

The new **draft Council Plan** (previously known as the Corporate Delivery Plan) has been discussed at each of the Committees and is due to be approved at the Council meeting in October. The plan has 3 priorities, 16 objectives and 74 projects. The plan can be viewed [here](#) and is worth having a look at as it really shows what we hope to have delivered in the coming years (some of which is already happening).

Brimscombe Port

All remaining occupying tenants have now handed in their keys and vacated the site in time for demolition to start this autumn. Grace Network, and associated social enterprises including The Long Table, are moving across the road to Brimscombe Mill, which is separate to the SDC development site.

The key milestones for the project can be found [here](#).

A short video setting out the vision for this £40 m development is now on the SDC website:
<https://www.stroud.gov.uk/environment/brimscombe-port/brimscombe-port-our-vision>

The process is now underway to appoint a developer partner to work with the council to deliver the project. The infrastructure basin and road infrastructure can be started from 2022. Once this is completed, the developer partner will prepare a planning application for 150+ homes (30 % affordable) to include quayside businesses and a community centre as set out in the [output specification](#). The port itself will be land locked for a period, until a further section of the canal is restored.

Canal project - Ocean Bridge, Stonehouse

The next big project on the Stroudwater Canal is to replace the existing Bristol to Gloucester Railway Bridge at Stonehouse. This will now take place from the 25 December to the 31 December. The existing bridge will be removed, foundation prepared, and the new bridge lifted into place during this tight schedule. The cost will be £1.8m and it is part funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. For further information see the press statement:

<https://www.stroud.gov.uk/news-archive/find-out-everything-you-need-to-know-about-the-new-ocean-railway-bridge-in-stonehouse-at-this-event>

This build is part of Phase 1B, which will connect the completed Phase 1 to Saul Junction on the Sharpness Canal, about 4 miles in length. The significant infrastructure works during 2019-21 at the Fromebridge Roundabout, funded by Highways England, have provided a method of traversing under the A38. <https://www.cotswoldcanalsconnected.org/>

Strategy & Resources Committee – 30 September

The Committee considered the budget monitoring report for Q1 and the **budget strategy** for the next financial year, setting out the assumptions that will be used when preparing the upcoming Medium Term Financial Plan.

There were updates from various **county level meetings** – including Leadership Gloucestershire, the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Joint Committee, and the Scrutiny Committee.

Information sheets were provided on **Brimscombe Port**.

One of the more interesting bits for me was the paper presented on the installation planned for October of **Water Source Heat Pumps** at Ebley Mill and Brimscombe Port Mill which will replace the gas boilers there. The Council has got large amounts of grant funding for this and is a step towards our carbon neutral 2030 targets.

Committee Papers can be found [here](#).

Community Services & Licencing Committee – 16 September

Members received an update on the **Committee's Budget Monitoring Report** for Q1 2021/22. Allowing for additional expenditure due to Covid, the spend was mainly in line with predictions.

Some changes to the current **Taxi Licencing Policy** were considered to adopt the Common Licencing Standards for Licencing Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Drivers in Gloucestershire, following public consultation. The document was developed by the Gloucestershire Licencing Officers Group (GLOG) with the aim of aligning local policies on matters included in the Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards issued by Department for Transport in 2020. The Statutory Standards focus on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults. Both this and an **amendment to change the current vehicle age policy to exempt electric vehicles** from the age requirements were agreed.

Similarly, Officers presented Members with a review on SDC's current **Statement of Principals under the Gaming Act 2005**, which is an annual requirement and considered recent updates to the Act. This proposal was also unanimously agreed.

One of the largest topics of work currently being undertaken is the District Council's **Leisure and Wellbeing Strategy for 2021-2041**. Officers presented a draft strategy which provides the rationale and recommendations to enable the delivery of exemplary leisure and wellbeing provision in the district over the next 20 years. Detailed options will now be prepared and presented to the Committee in December. This Strategy also addresses a unique and exciting opportunity for the district, across sectors and in partnership with allied health professionals and educationists, to establish a dynamic network of services and facilities which are accessible to all.

A report was approved which highlighted initial learning from local context and the new **'Feeding Gloucestershire Partnership'**. It recommended that Stroud District Council set up a new Food Justice Task and Finish Group to engage with the partnership and embed learning from their work into relevant council action plans.

A number of update reports were received from Members who sit on a range of external bodies. The future Work Programme to May 2022 was reviewed and updated. Committee papers can be found [here](#).

Environment Committee – 9 September

The draft **Gloucestershire Statement of Common Ground**, the long-term spatial planning agreement between county, the districts and GFirst LEP, was debated and approved. The committee discussed how the statement would be used, what it covered and didn't cover and its relationship to the District's Local Plan. Any major changes before finalisation will come back to the committee.

The Stroud District **Cycling & Walking Strategy Task & Finish Group** was established, to drive delivery on the Local Cycling and Walking Investment Plans (LCWIPs) for the district,

and to help realise the council's wider Active Travel ambitions. This will be chaired by Cllr Robin Layfield (Labour), with Cllr Martin Brown (Green) as Vice Chair. External members include GCC officers, Stroud Active, and the Stroud Valleys Cycling Campaign. It was noted that equalities/inclusion issues should be added to the groups Terms of Reference.

It was agreed that a Terms of Reference to re-establish the **Planning Review Panel** would be put to the next committee meeting. Committee papers can be found [here](#).

Housing Committee – 14 September

This is the committee that I sit on and so will be able to talk to if needed.

The main item for decision, was the options for **decarbonisation and energy efficiency** of council homes in the District. Following consideration of all the options, the Committee voted to support the recommendation, which will require investment of £180 m over the next 30 years to insulate council homes. This is part of the Council's ongoing commitment to address the climate emergency and will mean a reduction in emissions of up to 24.5%, with council tenants saving up to 11% on fuel bills. It includes decarbonisation and retrofit programme for the council's 5,000 properties. This new investment, which requires some borrowing, will mean on average council homes will meet SAP (Standard Assessment Procedure) C ratings by 2030. Committee papers can be found [here](#)

The Committee also looked at the quarterly budget monitoring and performance monitoring reports, the District Council's response to the **Social Housing White Paper** and received an update on actions plans for cleaner estates and for service standards.

Audit & Standards Committee – 28 September

This is the committee that Nigel Chairs and so will be best placed to talk to if needed.

The Committee received a **Counter-fraud update** with assurance over the counter fraud activities of the Council in relation to the work undertaken by the Counter Fraud Unit (CFU). The CFU is a specialist criminal enforcement service working with the Gloucestershire Local Authorities, West Oxfordshire District Council and a number of other public sector bodies such as social housing providers.

A number of councillors asked about probity on **Covid Grants** and it was confirmed a report will come to the next meeting.

There was discussion on the **2020/21 External Audit** – and it was noted that we were waiting on pension data to finalise the accounts

In the **Statement of Accounts**, only minor mainly timing restatements were made to the draft unqualified accounts reviewed in July and were approved pending final adjustments

The **Treasury Management Report** showed investments had returned 2.7% in quarter and questions were asked about when detail of the ethical fund split will be provided.

Internal Audit Progress Report reported on progress in relation to the approved plan for 2021/22. This will come back to the next meeting.

The **Risk Management summary** was briefly discussed as had been received late, it was noted that risk assessment had been improved, but that better reporting is needed.

Committee papers can be found [here](#).

