

District Councillor Report: H&T February 2024

Council Meetings (to Jan 31st 2024)

Stroud District Council (SDC) operates on a committee basis. Full Council (meetings of all councillors across the ward) delegates certain matters to these committees (which consist of several councillors each), retaining oversight of key issues such as approval of budgets.

COUNCIL EGM (Re: Local Plan), 25/01

- SDC local plan determines where and how development across the district takes place. It is a very powerful document. With no local plan, SDC would be severely curtailed in its ability to control and direct development.
- Local plans are renewed every circa 10 years. SDC's was last updated in 2015.
- One of the final steps in this process, the independent Inspectorate sign off, has been delayed on account of issues raised by the Inspectorate.
- The primary issue relates to access provision on junctions 12 & 14 on the M5.
- SDC has asked for a 6 month extension to the decision, to allow officers to work with other bodies to satisfy the Inspectorate that progress can be made on this matter. The Inspectorate is content with this approach.
- **The motion to pursue this option (a delay whilst progress can be made), was overwhelmingly carried.**

Environment Committee, 07/12

- SDC will shortly be consulting parish councils concerning the management of open spaces and amenities on new residential developments.
- This is in response to SDC's decision in a previous full council meeting to "better support the role of our Parish and Town Councils in their communities providing them first-refusal (along with the District Council) for any open spaces and amenities delivered on new residential developments in their community. Further, "in the event that a developer management company scheme is approved by the District Council, that legal agreements established during the planning application to protect step-in rights for the District, Town, Parish Council, should they wish to manage at a later date."
- I regard this a positive step forward in empowering local communities (within the confines of current planning regulation).

Housing Committee, 05/12

- More affordable homes will be provided by SDC in Brimscombe. We are delighted to continue provided social housing across the district, and are very proud of the fact that we own and manage a significant volume of social housing across the area.
- Committee resolved to renew the Tenant Support Fund, which exists to assist SDC tenants in financial hardship/ suffering from the cost of living crisis.

Other

- Lovetts Way flooding – I have reached out again to SDC planning enforcement (unfortunately, the contact who was aware of the case has since left SDC). An enforcement case has been opened (ref: EN24/0044)
- Note the DEFRA local rural community buildings grant fund - <https://acre.org.uk/village-halls-small-grants-fund/> This is available for community buildings (e.g. village halls) to make a range of improvements (20% capital funding) and may be of interest to our community.
- SDC requested an urgent response to concerns we have raised relating to the provision of housing for refugees and asylum seekers in the county. The letter also states our local commitment to welcome asylum seekers in Gloucestershire. We are calling on the Home Office to take action as follows:
 - o Improvements in the notice period for people to move on from contingency accommodation
 - o Better data sharing by the Home Office and Clearsprings Ready Homes to allow councils to plan
 - o Fair funding which applies to all asylum seekers, who receive a positive decision and leave to remain
 - o Extension of the Local Authority Housing Fund to the wider population of refugees.
- Reminder that I run a monthly online surgery on the first Monday each month. Please contact me to arrange a time: rich.wilsher@stroud.gov.uk
- Note that I will not be standing in the local elections in May. We have an excellent Lib Dem candidate for the ward however in Holly Simkiss. Holly is an outstanding local champion with a track record of action, having been a local school governor for several years. She also benefits from over a decade of professional experience within SDC itself, where she managed a team within the planning department. I have no doubt that Holly will be a tremendous advocate for our community.