

STROUD TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of COUNCIL 30th September 2024 at 7.30pm Congregational Church Hall, Bedford Street, Stroud

Present

Cllrs Sally Brooks, Tony Davey (Chair), David Drew, Karl Dürr-Sorensen, Mick Fealty, Susan Fenton, Jeremy Green (from item 6), Liz Hillary, Craig Horrocks, Simon Jacobson (from item 6), Chris Minett, Dee Nolson, Adrian Oldman, Val Saunders and Lucas Schoemaker.

In attendance

Helen Bojaniwska (CEO), Ben Challis (Programme Manager), Tom Sykes (Extended Studio)

Absent

Cllr Geoffrey Andrews

1. To receive apologies

Apologies were received from Cllrs Shyam Ananthan and Louisa Stinton (both personal), and Stroud District Councillors Cath Moore and Natalie Rothwell-Warn

2. To receive declarations of interest or requests for dispensations

No interests were declared. There were no requests for dispensations.

3. Minutes of the meeting of 15th July 2024

The minutes of the Council meeting on 15th July 2024 were **approved** by the members present and signed by the Mayor.

4. Mayor's remarks

The Mayor recommended that councillors follow his weekly blog on the Council website or the Mayor's Facebook page for regular updates. He had recently opened the new Night Angels charity shop and reported that they had already provided support for 160 issues in the town centre on Friday and Saturday nights.

Plans by the Chamber for the Goodwill Evening were progressing well, but there had been unnecessary complications about the road closures. A volunteer was needed to co-ordinate the marshals. The CEO advised that Council staff could potentially be co-opted to provide support.

5. Questions from members of the public

No questions received.

6. To receive reports from County and District Councillors (for information only)

County Councillor Drew reported that he had visited the £25m Severn Trent project to reduce sewer flooding in Stroud, which was now successfully managing both foul and flood waters. The next phase of the project would be in the Stanley Downton area at the main treatment plant.

District Councillor Cath Moore's written report was noted.

District Councillor Schoemaker reported on Stroud District Council's new crowdfunding scheme and asked councillors to encourage community organisations to apply. He celebrated the recent partnership work on cleaning up the town centre, which involved the County, District and Town councils.

Other current District Council projects included: a revamp of the Council plan and priorities, and consideration of options for increasing housing supply, for example pods, tiny homes, conversion of upper floors into bedsits and development of garage sites. A new Housing Oversight Board had been established.

Cllr Oldman asked about progress on the One Public Estate project. The CEO reported that work was ongoing in the station/Cheapside area and at Beeches Green, but had been complicated by multiple land ownerships.

Action: Councillor Drew to find out what the County Council's policy on weeding pavements is.

Cllr Nolson raised a concern about the number of council houses that remain empty for long periods.

Action: councillors to report any empty homes to Cllr Schoemaker so he can investigate.

Cllr Nolson asked whether Stroud District Council could be encouraged to use less opaque language in their communications, for example "depooling", which would make little sense to residents.

Action: Cllr Schoemaker to report back concerns about language to Stroud District Council officers.

7. CEO's Report

The CEO's report was noted.

8. To receive a presentation on design work for Locking Hill surgery

Architect Tom Sykes from Extended Studio gave a presentation on design work for the new council offices and depot. A cost plan for the full scheme previously presented had proved to be beyond the planned budget. It was explained that reducing the scale of the works impacts both the direct cost of labour and materials and the percentages applied for things like overheads and contingencies.

A revised, more affordable scheme was presented, focusing on the three main areas: council chamber, reception and open plan office space. In the meantime, the Green Spaces team were already completing works on their new workshop area. Ensuring that nothing extravagant is included and making use of everyday materials in interesting ways would help reduce the costs to a more affordable level. It was noted that at this stage there are still budget allowances for unknowns, which may yet be resolved.

The project phases and procurement plans were explained. It was noted that local contractors were currently being longlisted and invited to view the site, with a view to preparing a shortlist for tendering purposes. Drawings detailing the designs for the three main areas were presented.

Questions from councillors were answered as follows. The architect advised that noise levels in the open plan office space could be managed by introducing carpet, soft furnishings, furniture and cork pinboards. It was confirmed that rental of the chamber would also include the reception area as a breakout space and to provide access to the accessible toilet but would not extend into the open plan office space.

Councillor Schoemaker requested that the design of the exterior storage building should be interesting and colourful. Cllr Oldman recommended looking at the East Quay development in Watchet.

9. To receive a progress report on relocation and approve budget virements for the refurbishment of Locking Hill

It was noted that exterior insulation and an air source heat pump could be included in a later phase of the project. It was hoped that the new round of Public Sector Decarbonisation funding might be available to support this. Cllr Drew noted that it would be more efficient to do all of the works in one programme if funds allow.

The sale of Thanet House was discussed. The CEO reported that potential buyers seem to be awaiting the Autumn budget before making commitments. It was noted that vacancy levels in the town centre are falling. The CEO had been investigating potential alternative agents and reported that there was scope to reduce the sale price if necessary. It was noted that refurbishment works would not be instructed until the sale is agreed.

The Council **approved** budget virements totalling £121,326 to contribute to the refurbishment project as recommended by the Finance and Policy Committee.

Action: CEO to process virements

10. To receive an update on refurbishment projects at Locking Hill

The CEO reported that verbal feedback had been received from the Structural Engineer on the boundary wall. It was recommended that a gabion wall should be constructed to reduce the risk of collapse. CEO to negotiate costs with the owners of the wall and recommend that they do not allow vehicles to park on top of it.

Action: CEO to negotiate with the owners of the wall

There was also a potential that listed building consent might be required for the gabion wall, which would impact on the programme. It was therefore **agreed** to delegate to the CEO the timing for giving notice on the lease for Libby's drive as soon as the timetable for fully relocating the Green Spaces team is clearer.

Action: CEO to give notice on the lease for Libby's Drive

11. To consider a report on councillor allowances

A report on the potential to pay allowances to councillors from 2026 was considered, having been deferred at the Council meeting on 4th March 2024. It was felt to be ironic that whilst one of the motivations for introducing allowances was to support the recruitment of a broader demographic, the payments could potentially impact on people's benefits.

Cllr Oldman explained that the original motion had been introduced to recognise that councillors give up time, when they could be doing paid work, to participate in Council work and represent their community. It would potentially encourage more people to stand for election.

Cllr Schoemaker reflected that over the years the Council has become more professional and already has huge responsibilities for budgets, staff and governance and the potential for more to come through devolution.

It was **resolved** to ask Stroud District Council's Independent Remuneration panel to consider allowances for parish and town councils, with a view to introducing them in 2026.

12. To receive an update on staff recruitment

The CEO's report was noted.

13. Committee reports

The following reports, previously circulated, were received.

Environment Committee	9 th July and 17 th September 2024
Regeneration Working Group	18 th July 2024
Consultations & Highways Committee	22 nd July, 19 th August and 16 th September 2024
Community Committee	2 nd September 2024

14. Exclusion of press and public

It was **resolved** in view of the confidential nature of the business to be discussed to exclude the press and public for the rest of the meeting.

15. Update on legal matter

The CEO reported on action taken to recover legal costs.

The meeting ended at 8.47pm.

Chair.....

Date.....