



**Minutes of the meeting of the
REGENERATION WORKING GROUP
21st November 2024, at 10.00am
Virtual Meeting (Zoom)**

Present

Stroud Town Cllrs: Tony Davey (Chair), Mick Fealty, Liz Hillary, Craig Horrocks, Adrian Oldman (from item 8b)

Stroud District Council: Cllr Katy Hofmann, Mike Towson, Brendan Cleere, Amy Helliwell

Gloucestershire County Councillor: David Drew

Stroud Chamber: Tom Berry and Andrew Watton

In attendance

Helen Bojaniwska (CEO, Town Clerk)

Absent

Town Cllr Jeremy Green

1. Apologies

Stroud Town Cllrs: Geoffrey Andrews, Lucas Schoemaker

Stroud District Council: Leonie Lockwood

Gloucestershire County Council: Sarah Williams, Luisa Seft-Hayward, Tom Main, Danielle Chick, Paul Helbrow

2. Declarations of interest

None declared.

3. To consider requests for dispensations

There were no requests for dispensations.

4. Questions from members of the public

None received

5. Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting on 3rd October 2024 were **approved** by the members present and will be signed as a correct record by the Chair at the next opportunity.

6. Update on actions from previous meetings

A written report had been circulated. It was noted that some of the items would be covered later in the meeting.

Updates were received as follows:

- The Market Tavern site would soon be presented to Stroud District Council for a pre-application consultation.

- Windows of Opportunity – project cancelled due to zero take up. Some issues had been experienced with letting agents
- Noticeboards – in progress. Potential to include St Lurance Church grounds in signage work
- Poster locations – a map and list had been published and circulated.
- Bus shelter relocation to King Street – no response from GCC **Action:** Cllr Drew to follow up
- Roundabout weeds – SDC and GCC still in discussion.
- USP report – still in development. **Action:** Amy Helliwell to consult Chamber
- Tourism Strategy – still in development. **Action:** Amy Helliwell to consult Chamber

7. To receive progress reports from Gloucestershire County Council on:

Merrywalks Transport Hub

Progressing following public consultation.

King Street resurfacing

Proposals from Gloucestershire Highways had been circulated, which include: replacing decorative paving with coloured paving and removing the spiral design.

Brendan Cleere indicated that Stroud District Council were keen to collaborate, and potentially contribute to the cost of this project, particularly to address the causes of flooding at the Five Valleys Shopping Centre in 2023. Further discussions between the Centre and Highways were needed to discuss drainage.

Action: SDC, GCC Highways and Five Valleys to discuss.

Andrew Watton pointed out that some of the replaced shopfronts on King Street trespass beyond their registered boundaries and advised that this should be sorted out to avoid future ownership disputes. **Action:** Cllr Drew to follow up with Highways

8. To receive progress reports from Stroud District Council on:

Town centre cleanliness

Mike Towson reported on action days held in the town centre; ongoing work to remove algae from the surfacing on the High Street; use of a pressure washer and greater use of a pedestrian sweeper, which gets into more corners and slows weed regrowth. The Chair reported that there had been positive feedback from town centre businesses to the improvements.

The CEO reported that the Town Council were considering creating a new part time post to help with town centre tidiness from 2025.

The Chair reported a spike in flyposting and named several venues and events which were to blame.

Town centre toilets

Mike Towson reported that an update from the British Toilets Association recommended prioritising improvements to locks and Wallgates, which were now in progress. Works to clean the exterior were also planned and cleaning was being maintained. The final British Toilets Association had not yet been received, but was being chased.

Cllr Drew asked about the works to the toilets in the Five Valleys Shopping Centre. It was reported that some improvements had been made, but there were no plans to reopen the old toilets on the lower level.

Action: Mike Towson to arrange meeting to discuss a community toilets scheme. Cllr Oldman joined the meeting.

Car park improvements

An LED sign showing the number of available parking spaces had been installed at the entrance to Brunel Mall.

A contract to install devices to hold doors open had been commissioned, but the start date for the works was not yet known.

The Chair reported that he had received positive feedback about the LED sign.

Cllr Drew asked whether the London Road car park was free after 2pm, because the signage was unclear. Mike Towson confirmed that it is.

Action: Mike Towson to check clarity of London Road car park signage

Installation of bike lockers at Brunel Mall car park

Mike Towson reported that designs for lockers are being researched, for installation this year. The proposed design would provide a free to use locker, with a locking point inside, and external doors that can be secured with the user's own padlock.

Actions:

Mike Towson to confer with Gloucestershire County Council officers about the design of the lockers proposed for Merrywalks.

Cllr Oldman to circulate information about bike storage options.

Wallbridge improvements

No report received

Tourism

Amy Helliwell gave a report on tourism activity, including a Visit England campaign in 2025; networking with Creative England; promotion of local sites for TV, film and advertising; oversees marketing; and a campaign in 2025 related to the canal.

The trail app was reported to have 2,700 engagements and was due to have a "12 days of Christmas" trail.

It was reported that the Vegan Market had folded, but would be held at Christmas.

Other activities reported included: supporting the Pride in Gloucestershire (UK) bid for EuroPride 2027 to be held in Gloucester and Cheltenham; research by Gloucestershire University students on coach tourism; and the upcoming 80th anniversary of Thomas the Tank engine.

The Chair reported that footfall is down in all towns across the South West and UK. Stroud's footfall was down 5.1% in October, which was felt to be caused by the cost-of-living crisis, and schools' half-term. The Five Valleys Shopping Centre, High Street and King Street report the highest dwell time.

The Chair reported that the Chamber's leaflets, funded by Stroud District Council's Vitality fund had been printed and were about to be distributed. Other Stroud projects included a contribution to the replacement of noticeboards and the purchase of a Gobo projector.

Cllr Oldman reported that he had met Gloucestershire County Councillor Philip Robinson in Stroud and discussed waymarking and signage. It was noted that there was no signage on the Cheapside side of the station directing travellers to the town centre. He also confirmed that Real Time Passenger Information regarding bus services would also be installed at the station.

Action: Amy Helliwell to report station signage to Leonie Lockwood at Stroud District Council.

With regard to the Vitality Fund, Brendan Cleere confirmed that only half of the £200,000 budget had been awarded as grants; and £50,000 had been allocated to tourism work. The balance would not be made available to the market towns, but rolled forward for a refresh of the District Council's Economic Strategy instead. The new Strategy would be informed by the applications submitted. The unsuccessful application for shopfront improvement grants would be looked at very seriously as part of the Strategy review. A meeting would be held with the towns to undertake a 360-degree review.

Action: Brendan Cleere to organise a market towns meeting in the new year.

9. To discuss the potential closure of Stroud Post Office

Concerns were expressed about news reports that Stroud Post Office had been included on a list of offices that could close. It was noted that the Stroud branch is the last publicly-owned Crown Post Office in the area, and provides many more services than other locations. It was felt that closure would have a significant impact on local businesses and residents – greater even than bank closures; especially people with disabilities who might not be able to travel elsewhere.

Members of the Working Group felt retaining the Post Office was vital to the local economy and asked how they might be able to influence the process. It was reported that the building is privately owned. There were lots of questions about who might take on a franchise in Stroud and where it might be.

Actions: Cllrs Drew and Fealty to discuss with the Stroud MP.

It was agreed that an argument for keeping the Post Office in Stroud needed to be put together; the benefits for the town should be quantified; the different post office models needed to be understood; and data on other branches sought. In particular it was agreed to research what services a Crown PO can do that a franchise cannot.

Action: CEO to research PO services and collate information provided by members of the Working Group

10. To receive a budget report to end October 2024

The budget report was noted.

11. To consider a draft budget for 2025-26 for recommendation to Council

It was **agreed** to recommend the draft budget to Council.

With regard to the budget contribution to Wallbridge, Brendan Cleere reported that a landscape consultant was being procured to produce designs for the site. Ideas under consideration include: removal of some of the tarmac; improving the landscape; shielding an event space from the highway; and supporting the development of a walking and cycling route between Stroud and Rodborough. The road would be stopped up and parking removed.

12. To receive the CEO’s verbal report for information only

No report presented.

13. To receive a verbal report from the Stroud District Chamber of Trade

It was reported that Tom Berry had recently been elected as Chair of the Chamber, with Tony Davey and Armorel Willoughby as Vice-Chairs.

Much of the Chamber’s current focus was on Goodwill events. The Fireworks event at Marling had been very popular on the VisitStroud.uk website with a peak of over 1,121 unique individual views. The website often holds 600 individual users per day.

As an interim measure the informal tourist information point will be relocating to Confection Affection. It was felt that Visitor Information Points need support if tourism is truly valued in the District and that “Happy Spend” is essential to the local economy.

Footfall improved slightly in September after the significant drop of August. The decline in footfall had slowed, but growth is unlikely with consumer confidence levels being so fragile. The Business Rate Relief cut and changes to the minimum wage and national insurance rates are a worry to local businesses.

Revisits per month average 6.6 – the lowest of all major towns in the District, and below benchmark towns. Dwell time is generally static, but dropped in September to an average of 49 minutes down 2 minutes from September 2023.

The meeting closed at 12 noon.

Chair

Date

Appendix 1

UPDATE ON ACTIONS OUTSTANDING OR IN PROGRESS FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

DATE OF MEETING	ACTION	OFFICER	STATUS	Priority	NOTES
20/07/2023	Inform group when Market Tavern planning application has been submitted	CEO: HB	In progress		Update: Soon to be presented to SDC for a pre-application consultation.
15/2/2024	Delivering the Windows of Opportunity pilot - to get the future high street champions a presence on in the town	Chamber of Trade	In progress		CANCELLED
15/2/2024	Bike lockers in Brunel Mall Car Park	SDC	In progress		See item 8
15/2/2024	New information boards for car parks (with "spaces remaining info)	SDC	COMPLETED		
15/2/2024	Fire Door Holders in Brunel Mall Car Park, many still out of action	SDC	IN PROGRESS		
20/6/2024	Research replacement of missing History Board and seek funding from Five Valleys Shopping Centre – location to be decided	STC: HB	IN PROGRESS		
20/6/2024	Investigate potential to extend History trail to include the St Laurence Church grounds.	STC: HB	IN PROGRESS		
20/6/2024	Transfer ownership of notice boards opposite Sims Clock and at the top of the High Street to Stroud Town Council.	SDC	IN PROGRESS		
20/6/2024	Refurbish and repurpose notice boards	STC: HB	IN PROGRESS		
20/6/2024	Collate a list of poster locations for sharing.	STC: HB	COMPLETE		
20/6/2024	Share final report on public toilets with the CEO and Chamber Chair to review and agree priorities.	SDC: Mike Towson	IN PROGRESS		Report in progress
20/6/2024	Discuss potential collaboration with other towns on the procurement of bike	SDC: Mike Towson STC: Cllr Davey	IN PROGRESS		Berkeley interested

	storage lockers to potentially secure bulk discounts.				
20/6/2024	Liaise with CEO on Wallbridge improvements	SDC: Leonie Lockwood	IN PROGRESS		
20/6/2024	Creating a safe link between the schools on Cainscross Road and Stroud station.	All partners	Future work plan		
20/6/2024	Transfer responsibility for town centre benches and street furniture to Stroud Town Council	SDC	Future work plan		
18/7/2024	Bus shelter for King Street CEO to approach Lloyds Bank	STC: HB	IN PROGRESS		
18/7/2024	Consider relocation of bus stop on King Street.	GCC	Outstanding		Cllr Drew to chase up
18/7/2024	Investigate responsibility for roundabout weeding	SDC: Mike Towson GCC	IN PROGRESS		SDC and GCC in discussion.