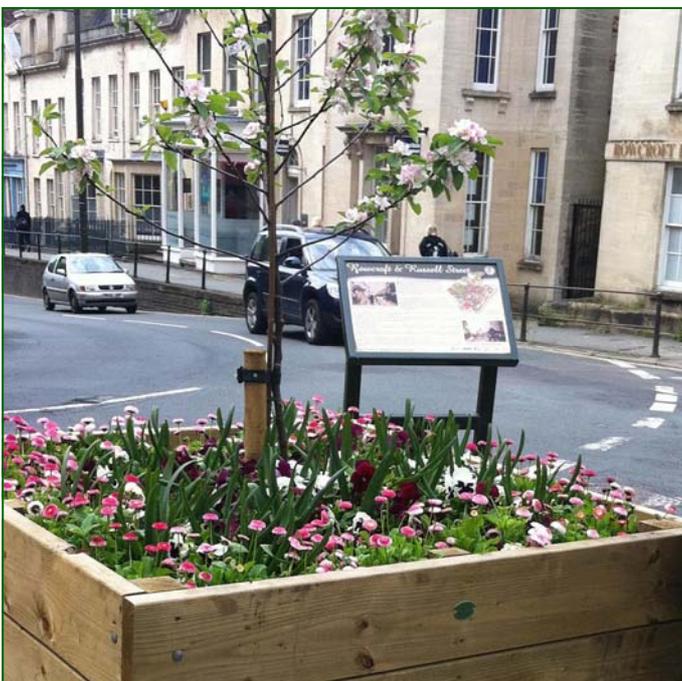




ANNUAL REPORT 2014-15



MAYOR'S REPORT



Due to the elections on May 7th the annual report has had to be compiled early and is therefore a resume of the council year to date.

In 2014 the Town Council voted to undertake a Neighbourhood Development Plan called Shaping the Heart of Stroud. It has generated local involvement by all members of the community who have been given the opportunity to participate and comment on what they would like to see in Stroud in the future. This has been managed by a steering group chaired by Leonora Rozee and will be ready for independent examination by the end of June.

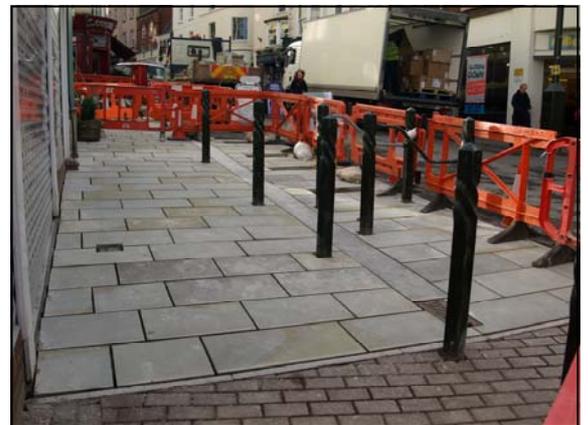
The decision about the Javelin Park incinerator is hugely disappointing and shows a degree of government disdain for local opinion by ignoring the valid arguments against it.

The refurbishment of Lansdown Hall and Gallery is ongoing and continues to provide improved space [to exhibit and work in] for exhibitions and community activities.

The planning applications for the proposed out of town supermarkets were deferred late last year to allow time for consideration of one in the centre of the town. This has been well received by traders who welcome incoming trade that an appropriate supermarket could bring. This would also help to revitalise the town centre at a time when local shops are under threat from internet shopping and increasing rents.

The next stage of resurfacing the High Street is imminent which will also help to improve the attractiveness of the town along with restricted vehicular access at certain times.

Stroud Town Council continues to support local organizations that benefit many sectors of the community. We are determined to continue to play a role in providing funding while so many services are being cut back due to government cutbacks and reductions in grants to local authorities.



For an amazing third year Stroud won a gold medal so many thanks go to the Stroud in Bloom committee and the Green Spaces team.

Finally, I would like to thank all the staff and fellow councillors for their support during the last year. I would also like to thank our former Clerk, Sue Capener, who has done so much for the town, and welcome our new Clerk, Helen Bojaniwska, who will be starting next month, and wish her the very best in her new role.



Mayor, Amanda Moriarty

CONSULTATIONS COMMITTEE

It gets harder every year to write a different report when the nature of our work remains much the same. Once again we have met every 4 weeks and considered about 200 planning applications. We are still awaiting the outcome of planning decisions on supermarkets and the result of the appeal concerning Rodborough Fields. We have in the past month received the good news that the application for Judicial Review of the Baxter's Field decision has been withdrawn.

Sadly, Eric Pickles decided to approve the unnecessary and expensive incinerator. The last line of defence is SDC's legal challenge. After that it will be down to those who take direct action to stop this money-burning behemoth.

Last year we mentioned a report on the Cheapside area. This year, a detailed planning application is imminent; this will have been shaped by extensive public consultation under the aegis of the ongoing Neighbourhood Development Plan steering group, Shaping the Heart of Stroud. The NDP is about to go into its final round of public consultation, and after that a set of options for the Heart of Stroud will be written up and put to a referendum in the autumn. Once approved, the Neighbourhood Development Plan will form part of statutory planning guidance, which will be taken into account and should steer planning decisions to what the public want.

We have also continued to comment on:

- Road works and the state of our roads
- License applications
- The usual other odds and ends!



Chair, Kevin Cranston

FINANCE COMMUNITY AND POLICY COMMITTEE

The committee has overseen the financial activities of the council but has not had to be engaged in significant adjustment of its methods. We have benefited from the gradual improvements discussed and implemented in recent years which have made the committee's work easier.

The council's various needs for insurance cover were examined in detail by the Clerk and various new quotations for our cover were reviewed. It was agreed to consolidate cover with Zurich with the benefits of cost reductions from having a five-year fixed rate agreement. This also means that staff time will be reduced in that period from examining the annual renewal requirements.

The town council committed itself to the process of producing a Neighbourhood Development Plan for the town centre, to be organised on its behalf by a Steering Group. This was started in May 2014 and it is intended to produce the Plan by the summer of 2015, and for it to be presented to the residents of the parish in a referendum to be organised by Stroud District Council. The FCP committee recommended to council that a budget be approved for the administration of the community engagement process which such a plan entails. This was approved at a meeting of council.

The council applied for and received an award of a Government grant of £6,995 from the Locality Fund, to pay for specific elements of the production of the plan within a period ending in December 2014. This target was achieved and the payment of the full grant has been made to the town council to cover these specific costs.

FINANCE COMMUNITY AND POLICY COMMITTEE continued

The council also agreed to fund the balance of costs that may be required, some of which were not covered by the Locality Grant, up to a maximum of £30,000. The largest part of this will be the cost of a part-time administrator to organise the logistics of the plan and liaise with the many community groups and personnel who have volunteered to produce the Neighbourhood Plan. A draft of the Plan will be presented to the Town Council for approval at its last full meeting in April 2015. There will then follow a period of external examination and further consultation of the Plan organised by the District Council prior to any referendum.

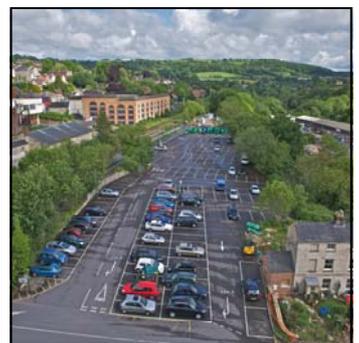
The production of the Neighbourhood Development Plan and the necessary wide-ranging public engagement in consultation will become relevant to many of the Council's key policies. Therefore, it was agreed to postpone the review of these policies until the end of the NDP community engagement process. The committee was able to make progress in reviewing some operational policies, such as its lost property procedure, and its protocol for handling complaints.

An agreement was also reached for the renewal of the lease of the two flats on the upper floors of Thanet House.

The funds for the building works at Lansdown Hall and Gallery have been overseen by three members of the committee who are appointed to the specific Working Group, and the Town Clerk. These funds are comprised of external grants, which a fund-raiser has negotiated on the council's behalf, and money from the allocated council budget. New heat pump systems were installed at the Hall as well as a new glass interior lobby for the Gallery, both of which will impact on the efficiency of the heating systems of the building. Work also started in February 2015 on the construction of a new extension to the Hall.

The other main role of the committee is oversight of the process of assessing applications to both the Community Support Fund and the Small Grants Fund. This specific role of the FCP committee was overseen by the Deputy Chair of the committee, and this year a total of £50,000 was allocated to local voluntary organisations. These included support for the CAB, Stroud Valleys Project, The Door youth organisation as well as contributions to other festivals and community events that enrich local life.

Chair (up to 20.10.14), Steve Hurrell
Deputy Chair, Eva Ward



GREEN SPACES COMMITTEE

One of the problems with reporting on our achievements in managing the green spaces around Stroud – the parks, the cemetery and various smaller sites around the town – is that much of the work is pretty cyclical and routine in nature, the kind of work that people often take for granted unless there's a problem. Because of this it really is a pleasure to be able to report that this year saw the awarding of our third successive gold from the Britain in Bloom judges. The success is of course shared with others, the volunteers from the Stroud in Bloom committee and the District's work at Stratford Park, and is focused around a set theme. But it's also a testament to the high general standard of management of our green spaces team.

Further work goes on behind the scenes. One important piece of work has been the completion of a full survey of all the trees under our management to keep up-to-date with the latest guidance. We now have detailed information about their condition and a clear programme of management in place to minimise any public risk.

The success of the Daisy Bank community group has continued this year. We have worked with them and removed part of the sand area after listening to local views and a new disc swing has been installed which is proving popular. Further work to revamp the site is planned so expect more news to follow next year.

Bisley Road cemetery is our most important wildlife site. We have undertaken more scrub clearance this year to curb its encroachment onto the special flower rich limestone grassland, while on the lower still active part of the cemetery tree planting has taken place to make the recently levelled area more attractive. We have also updated the wildlife management plan for the site, working with Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust.

And finally, we ran a consultation exercise to gather ideas for the future of Trinity Pocket Park, opposite the hospital. The consensus was that people wanted to see an improved version of what we already have - a tranquil area with wildlife interest - but some of the more ambitious ideas for the site were harder to visualise. For now, working with interested residents and community groups who use the adjoining Trinity Rooms, we are making a start on the clear cut boundary and access improvements required. Once these are done it should be easier for people to think through what further changes (if any) are wanted.

Chair, Rob Green



SUMMARY OF ACCOUNTS 2014-15

Activity	Expenditure in 2013-14	Expenditure in 2014-15*
Maintenance of cemeteries, recreation and play areas, floral displays and purchase of new Green Spaces equipment	£198,179	£203,450
Support for the arts, festivals, festive lights, town centre and regeneration, including Lansdown Hall	£57,174	£107,291
Administration, including civic activities, mortgage, building maintenance, public advice, consultations, communications and community engagement	£186,724	£173,372
Community, including community grants	£58,450	£54,750
Planning consultations including Neighbourhood Plan, highways, footpaths	£6,155	£19,463
Total expenditure	£506,682	£558,326
Income	£641,880**	£592,362

* unaudited figures as per projection at 13.3.15

** includes Public Works Board loan added to reserve for Lansdown Hall improvements

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