



# ANNUAL REPORT 2015-16





## MAYOR'S REPORT



When I read last year's report I had a sense of déjà vu – with many similar things happening this year. We are again holding the Annual Town Meeting early on 24th March, due an imminent election on May 5th and we are about to see more of the High Street resurfaced; work should be in progress by the time of the meeting.

The Council's community venue Lansdown Hall is looking better and better as the refurbishment approaches its conclusion.

There is still no firm news on supermarket developments in or near the town. The Town Centre shops are still vulnerable to the internet and changing tastes in shopping.

Although it may appear that nothing has changed, in fact things are always moving along. The public consultation phase of the Neighbourhood Development Plan has been completed and we are confident that the Planning Inspector appointed to examine

the plan will clear the way for a referendum on 11th August following a hearing planned for 19th March.

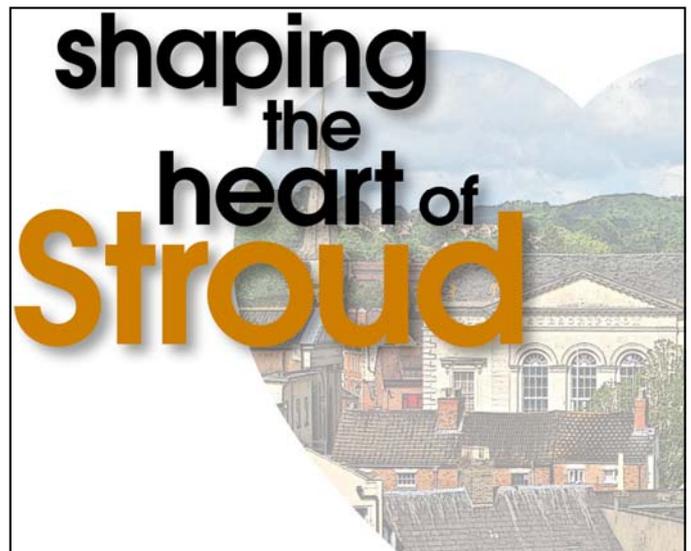
I am immensely grateful to all of the hardworking team of volunteers, who put together such a comprehensive NDP, which was described by an advisor for Historic England as:

“arguably the most impressive of the many Plans in the south west we have seen – not only for the depth, detail of consideration and comprehensiveness of its general scope, but especially for its grasp of what makes the area locally distinctive and how this should both inform, and be respected in, proposals for change”.

As Government spending cuts bite ever deeper, we are providing support to more groups that provide help for the vulnerable in society. We are also arguing against the cuts to essential services such as the vital support given to young families by the Children's Centres.

Finally, I would like to thank Jim Mathison, who has recently left us after 5 years as our Green Spaces Manager. We look forward to working with his replacement, Mike Dando, who brings a wealth of experience, but hopefully not a sense of déjà vu!

**Mayor, Cllr Kevin Cranston**



## CONSULTATIONS COMMITTEE

Since 2010 when the Government scrapped the established strategies of all planning authorities, opportunistic developers have sought to exploit the absence of local development plans to justify schemes to build on some of our most cherished landscapes. Stroud has endured more than its fair share of battles and the Consultations Committee has repeatedly supported our community and campaigners trying to protect a number of valued green-fields from these predatory applications. Notable among them: Baxter's Fields which has just seen the third scheme by Gladman Developments rejected by the Planning Officers of Stroud District Council, and Grange Fields opposite Stratford Park which has also been rejected recently by the Council. It remains to be seen whether these refusals are appealed.

Supermarkets applications were also in abundance in 2015 and permission was given for a new store on the Dudbridge Road despite the preference of the Town Council to give priority to plans for the former Market Tavern.

Relief may have been delivered by the completion of the Stroud District local plan which is among the first in Gloucestershire to be implemented. This designates where development should take place and undermines the basis of the predatory applications which have blighted life in the Stroud valleys since 2010.

The importance of a strategy, well informed by local opinion, was highlighted by the interest generated by the plans recently submitted by Ecotricity to give New Imperial House and Axion House a lively external makeover. In our opinion these were too lively, especially in the conservation area. Some Developers have worked more collegiately with the Town Council and we particularly welcomed the approach of Newland Homes with their plans to develop 37 dwellings at Cheapside. At the time of writing both of these applications have yet to be determined by the District Council.

The Consultations Committee hopes that greater time and energy may be turned towards the more positive and welcome planning applications. Stroud Town Council has approved the draft Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) "Shaping the Heart of Stroud" which has been through a final consultation. The next stages are an examination and finally, a referendum in August 2016. Already, this plan carries some influence and can be called upon to support the view of the Consultations Committee in responding to applications. Once it is implemented, the NDP will have considerable bearing on the nature of development in the commercial heart of the town and we hope will bring improvements to the access, visual design and economic viability of our much valued town centre.

***Chair, Cllr Simon Arundel***



## FINANCE COMMUNITY AND POLICY COMMITTEE

This has been an unusual year for the Town Council since members were elected for only one year, rather than the usual four-year term. The committee membership changed and brought a new perspective to its activities.

During the course of the year various discussions were held and it was agreed that in future years the awarding of council grants would be organised in a different way. The Clerk presented a report on community funding opportunities including recommendations on the potential use of innovative community engagement techniques. It was resolved to offer a separate grant fund for arts and cultural events from 2016, with no overall change in the grants budget. It was also resolved to change the grant application timetable from 2016, to provide two application dates a year for the Community Support Fund and arts and cultural events. Applications for small grants will continue to be considered three times a year.

In the 2015-2016 financial year grants were awarded from the Community Support Fund to various community organisations including Allsorts, Hill Valley and Vale Children's Centre, the Sacred Music Festival, Stroud Film Festival, the Save'n'Borrow Credit Union, Stroud Nature CIC and to the Stroud Fringe CIC.

Small Grants were awarded to Stroud Valleys Woodcraft Folk, St Laurence Church, Hawkwood College, Sea Cadets, Top of Town Community Association, Stroud Football Poets, Gloucestershire Printmaking Co-operative, Ignition Gloucestershire and to Stroud Folk Weekend.

The importance of Service Level Agreements has been fully accepted and following reviews revised agreements were adopted with Lansdown Hall Trust, Home-Start, the Marah trust, the Citizens Advice Bureau and The Door. A one-year service level agreement for the provision of gardening assistance for Stroud residents for 2016-17 was also approved.

Committee members considered ongoing contractual service delivery arrangements with Stroud District Council as well as potential asset transfers from Stroud District Council, and resolved to recommend that Council look positively at such proposals. Council agreed to pursue these issues by setting up a working group which will report in the next financial year.

It was resolved for the council to invest in the Public Sector Deposit Fund. Following advice and discussion the committee was able to recommend revised Terms of Reference to Council which were agreed.

The clerk brought a range of town council policies to the attention of the committee for their consideration and after discussion, and some amendments, these were recommended for adoption by Council. These included a Data Protection policy, a Procurement policy, a revised Code of Conduct for Complaints and the adoption of a Code of Conduct and Procedure for Dispensations.

A range of new procedures recommended by the Council's Communications Working Group were considered and adopted.

Throughout the year the committee has had oversight of the expenditure of the town council's Town Centre Neighbourhood Development Plan, which included additional grant aid of £8,000 from the government's Locality fund. The plan was fully approved by the Town Council in December 2015 and was then passed to the local planning authority, Stroud District Council, for the necessary further legal processes prior to a likely referendum in August 2016. It is not expected that further major financial costs will be incurred by the Council prior to the referendum.

***Chair, Cllr Steve Hurrell***

## GREEN SPACES COMMITTEE

Our work on the town's green spaces is by far the council's biggest expenditure and, for most residents, the public face of what we do. We were therefore pleased with the overall highly positive response to a recent public survey of users of some of our main sites. We always welcome suggestions or comments and our staff are always willing to explain what they are doing or trying to achieve.

Most of the work we do is routine, though we always seek to balance this with a programme of improvements. A few highlights from the year are picked. Of course we have to start with the awarding of our fourth consecutive 'in Bloom' gold, a partnership in which the Town Council plays a significant role.

We have continued the programme of managing the scrub habitat at the old cemetery on Bisley Road, our most important wildlife site, to benefit the wildflower rich grassland. This year we have been rewarded recording a number of White Helleborine orchids, thought lost from the site. We have also seen a very productive partnership with Stroud Valleys Project volunteers helping us with some of the habitat management. Stroud Valleys Project also ran a couple of successful public events in conjunction with Gloucestershire Butterfly Conservation demonstrating the value of the cemetery as an educational resource.

Many of you will hopefully have noticed improvements outside St Laurence church. Many of the flagstones had become damaged and uneven. Repairs have been completed making this prominent area of the town more attractive and safer.

Finally, we would like to take this opportunity to thank Jim Mathison, our Green Spaces Manager for the last 5 years, who has left recently to take up a job in South Gloucestershire. During Jim's time he and the team played an important role in securing the string of consecutive golds in the Heart of England Britain in Bloom competition. He was also responsible for overseeing a number of other improvements such as the very popular introduction of pictorial meadows around the town. He achieved his ambition to leave the town's green spaces better than he found them. We wish him well.

***Chair, Cllr Rob Green***



## SUMMARY OF ACCOUNTS 2015-16

Activity	Expenditure in 2014-15 (actual)	Expenditure in 2015-16 (projected year end)
Maintenance of cemeteries, recreation and play areas, floral displays and purchase of new Green Spaces equipment	£163,102	£214,980
Support for the arts, festivals, festive lights, town centre and regeneration, including Lansdown Hall	£87,891	£212,782
Administration, including civic activities, mortgage, building maintenance, public advice, consultations, communications and community engagement	£215,188	£245,780
Community, including community grants	£47,787	£70,274
Planning consultations including Neighbourhood Plan, highways, footpaths	£24,473	£12,370
Total expenditure	£488,654	£685,912
Income	£597,861	£590,865

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