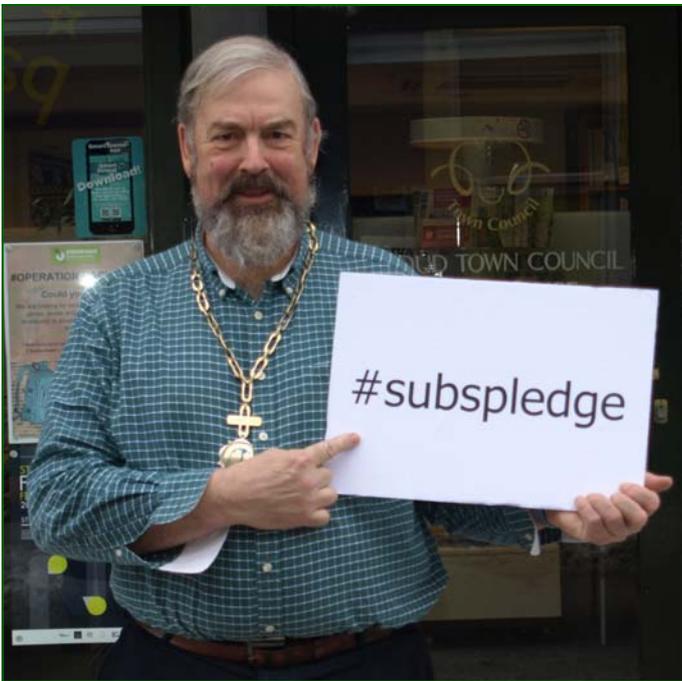




ANNUAL REPORT

2017-18



MAYOR'S REPORT



Although the last year has been dominated by the Sub Rooms, the normal business of the Council has continued unabated.

The Consultation committee has continued to comment on planning applications and other matters; Finance, Community and Policy (FCP) have made grants to many of the numerous voluntary groups who work to make life tolerable for the less fortunate in our community. The new look Green Spaces team has started to engage with the community to further improve the biodiversity and environmental well being of the town. There are more detailed reports of the work of the committees further on.

There has been much to celebrate in Stroud, the completion of the first phase of the reopening of the Canal was marked with a visit by HRH Prince of Wales in February. The recent announcement by the Heritage Lottery Fund that they will fund the next phase of restoration means that Stroud will become a proper canal town again bringing more visitors and jobs to the town. SDC took a bold decision to invest in the redevelopment of Merrywalks, this too should bring more people into the town and make a big difference to the feel of the town centre. In the future we can expect the very successful Rush Skate Park to move to Stratford Park where they hope to build a world class centre which may even be the main training base for the national team. Stroud is definitely on the up.

Whilst I cannot claim credit for all of this good news, Stroud Town Council has helped by working with others, lobbying the relevant people, enabling volunteers and consulting the public to ensure that we help get the best deal we can for the town. It is very much a team effort with Councillors, from across the political spectrum, working with our excellent team of Officers to drive forward the projects that we hope will help to make Stroud an even better place to be than it is now.

After much debate and passion, we are getting close to an agreement with Stroud District Council for a transfer of the freehold of the Subscription Rooms. We hope to be able to sign a Heads of Terms agreement in June.

Mayor, Cllr Kevin Cranston



CONSULTATIONS COMMITTEE



Activity for the Consultations Committee settled down in 2017 as the Town Neighbourhood Development Plan and the District Council Local Plan bedded in for their first full year of co-existence. After some friction we have seen more planning decisions take account of our NDP policies. This includes the store-front design code which has been long in existence and much ignored but now seems to be having the desired influence and we are seeing one or two improvements in the aesthetic quality of our shopping centre.

Early in 2017, Gladman Developments withdrew their appeal against refusal of permission to build housing on Baxter's Fields in the Slad Valley. This brought to an end the long run of speculative applications to build in our most cherished landscapes. The pause permits both the District Council Planning team and our Committee to focus on planning which accords with the settled Local Plan.

More recently, the Committee expressed its support for a modest scale retail store and 130 houses to be built on the Canal side off Dudbridge Road. Outline

permission having been granted by the District Council, allows Stroud Metal Company, an important local employer to complete a relocation within our District to a modern purpose-built and more sustainable factory. It also brings much needed additional housing close to town and we hope to see a high quality design in terms of accommodation, appearance and sustainability with improved connectivity for users of the canal path in the final plans. Another modest store was given qualified support by the Committee and permitted by the District Council. This development will also bring about the rejuvenation of industrial buildings on the Bath Road Trading Estate. Whilst the Town Council had previously argued against out-of-town supermarket proliferation, both these applications were much more modest in their scale than the preceding applications on the same sites. Whilst permission is given to the use rather than to the brand, we observed that these applications from the budget retailers Lidl and Aldi, were well supported by local residents. We hope their modest scale and range will not deprive our town centre retailers of the trade that supports our independent shops.

On the horizon for 2018 we look forward to seeing plans for the rejuvenation of the Merrywalks shopping centre.

Aside from the immediate issues of where and what to build, our Committee has contributed to a number of consultations including the Local Plan Review, highways Improvements, car parking and roadworks, licensing applications, the Heritage Strategy and the GFirst Gloucestershire 2050 consultation. These have often involved digesting long documents in time for our monthly meetings and I am grateful to my fellow Councillors for the time and thought that they have dedicated.

Chair, Cllr Simon Arundel

LANSDOWN HALL WORKING GROUP

This year has seen the installation of more new windows on the street side of the hall, with the generous support of a grant from the Gloucestershire Environment Trust/Entrust. The working group has been investigating potential options for further improvements to the Hall and a feasibility study was commissioned to look at ideas for improving ventilation, providing better toilets and new bar and catering facilities. In the coming year we will be working with the Lansdown Hall and Gallery Trustees, who lease the building from the Council, to decide which projects will best support their business plan.



GREEN SPACES COMMITTEE

The previous report highlighted significant changes including reorganising the green spaces team to have a much greater community focus and the transfer of sites from Stroud District Council. These changes took effect at the end of the year, meaning that much of our time has been spent settling in to new roles and responsibilities. Further changes including contracting specific tasks, upgrading machinery and moving to a new depot on the Slad Road have followed. While accepting that this doesn't come across as particularly riveting, the purpose is to make us much more efficient not as a cost cutting exercise but so that we can improve our management of parks and public spaces, and to take on a greater role in looking after the town. Things are starting to take shape, with the year seeing a lot of preparatory work.

Owning parks and other sites across the town brings responsibilities. We have been reviewing a backlog of more complicated maintenance and safety work and have identified some major wall repairs, for example at Bank Gardens, Daisy Bank and at some of the allotments. Planning around this is advanced and the work will be starting in the next couple of months.

Plans are also underway to undertake consultation events over the future management of Park Gardens and the Long Ground as part of our commitment to engaging with local communities – both users and residents. One of the issues we are seeking to address is the on-going issue of antisocial behaviour in Park Gardens. We have started some early engagement on this in partnership with the police, the district council and the Door youth project. Encouraging greater use of the park and increasing local ownership we think is part of the answer.

We are continuing with our engagement around volunteering and now have an established volunteer group helping to manage the Bisley Road Cemetery as a nature reserve (details of how to join in available at the Town Council office). We have also dipped our toe in looking to start more of a town centre volunteering group focused on Park Gardens. We haven't got this right as yet so we will be spending some time seeing if we can improve the idea and test whether there is enough support to make this work.

On a slightly more unusual note, we've been busy not cutting grass. We're not abandoning sites but in certain specific places we're letting the grass grow longer through reduced mowing to allow a more diverse grass sward including wild flowers to grow, with the additional benefit of using less petrol. So far we've

piloted this in areas of Uplands playing field, the Leazes and Daisy Bank. The results in Uplands playing field have been of note as orchids have survived years of close cropping and are now being allowed to flower again. On a similar theme, we've also planted wild flower mix in a border at Daisy Bank – along Horns Road, to create an attractive edge and to act as a buffer to avoid having to trim above the road below. We've chosen a flower mix noted by the Royal Horticultural Society as perfect for pollinators and offering an extended flowering season.

In Bisley Road Cemetery we've been monitoring the presence of adders and getting specialist advice on how to manage for them. Adders are a protected species but their numbers continue to decline. While they've been seen again this year we have not yet established the strength of the population.

Finally, as publicity for an upcoming event, we will be holding a Bioblitz at the Bisley Road Cemetery site on the 23rd and 24th of June. The purpose here is to get as much information as we can from a range of specialists, to engage the local community, and to update our records and influence future management in a fun and informative way. Look out for details in the press, ask at the office or just turn up to see what's going on.

Chair, Cllr Rob Green



FINANCE COMMUNITY AND POLICY COMMITTEE

The Finance, Community and Policy committee has responsibility for oversight of the council's spending, budgeting, setting council policies and distributing grants to community groups. For me personally, the last of these is one of the most enjoyable duties I undertake as a councillor. It represents a wonderful opportunity to support the voluntary work being done by Stroud's residents to support their neighbours and enrich the town's culture.

We have three different grant pools: Arts and Culture, Community Support and Small Grants. Perhaps unsurprisingly for such a creative town, the Arts and Culture fund has been the most highly subscribed of the three, granting funds to support several of Stroud's festivals, the Goodwill evening and the Stroud Wassail.

The Community Support fund has helped events and organisations such as Stroud Nature Festival, Access Bike and Hawkwood College.

The Small Grants fund is varied, with funds given this year to support events, small projects and items of equipment for a variety of organisations. We aim for our small grants fund especially to be as accessible as possible and particularly welcome applications from community organisations who have not previously applied, so if you're in the process of getting a new group off the ground or are involved with an existing group which might benefit from funding, do get in touch. More details are online, or advice can be obtained from the council offices.

In addition to the council's grants, we provide 'service level agreements' to several local charities, who agree to provide defined services to residents of the town in return for an annual financial contribution. We reviewed a number of these agreements this year, renewing contributions to Uplands Care Services, Down to Earth, Home-Start and Marah Trust and adding a new agreement with Allsorts to support their work for families with disabled children.

The Subscription Rooms have been a dominating theme in this year's council business. As part of these

discussions, the council realised that although Stroud's artistic and cultural offerings are a key contributor to the town's vibrancy, there is little to formally hold the various strands together. To address this, we applied for Arts Council funding to commission a Cultural Strategy for Stroud, which we were successfully awarded. Many people who are involved with Stroud's creative scene were consulted, and a draft strategy has been published, which will soon be open for public consultation. It is hoped that the strategy will provide priorities for developing the town's artistic offering, and provide direction and information for local organisations to develop their projects and funding bids.

In addition to the above, we have discussed how funds from our reserve should be allocated to canal projects, and agreed to contribute to step-free access to the canal at Bowbridge from Eagle Mill Close. We have also reviewed several of our internal policies to ensure that we are fully compliant with our legal obligations. We're aware of our obligation to use public funds wisely so we undertake continual monitoring of the council's budgets and expenditure.

Chair, Cllr Alan Sage



PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

The Committee has had a relatively quiet year. In April and May 2017 we completed the recruitment of new jobs following the previous year's staff review and welcomed our new Deputy Clerk, Project Officer and three new Rangers to the team.

We have also been piloting a new role relating to fundraising, both for Council projects and to support

community groups. The pilot has proved extremely interesting and demonstrated a need for a community development role, which we are currently researching and developing and hope to roll out later this year.

Chair, Cllr Rob Green

NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN WORKING GROUP

This working group oversees and advises on the projects identified by the Neighbourhood Development Plan, Shaping the Heart of Stroud. Its membership has featured Town Councillors and representatives of community organisations such as the Stroud Preservation Trust and Chamber of Trade and Commerce.

One of the primary focuses of the group has been Stroud Station Forecourt. This area was identified as a gateway to the town centre and features historic buildings designed by Brunel. Travel surveys and community consultations have revealed that functional and visual improvements could be made to improve passenger experience and its links with the town centre. Working with specialist transport consultants the Town Council has funded the development of a Masterplan for the station area which seeks to enhance the appearance, improve access for cyclists and pedestrians, improve signage and provide facilities for sustainable transport solutions. The plans have been shared with our partners and stakeholders and we anticipate a meeting with Network Rail in the next few months.

The Council has also been successful in a bid to the GWR Customers and Communities Infrastructure Fund to develop the station plans still further, indicating a commitment and willingness to improve local rail transport facilities by GWR. Furthermore, we hope our support of the newly formed Friends of Stroud Station group will bring enhancements to the forecourt. The toughest challenge may be improving access over the



railway lines, but we are committed to pursuing this goal for the benefit of all.

Improving access for cyclists and walkers is a theme that runs through several projects. This year we have welcomed Bainton Bikes to Stroud, a hire bike scheme which it is hoped will raise the profile of cycling and create more opportunities for people to embrace active modes of transport for their health and the environment. The NDP working group has also supported the establishment of a cross parish cycling group to explore the barriers to cycling and to develop a co-ordinated approach along routes.

Improvements to the quality of the streets and spaces in the town such as Gloucester Street are being commissioned with the funding from our Gloucestershire County Councillor. There is plenty more still to address, but progress is being made. The promise of a new shopping centre at Merrywalks will undoubtedly bring opportunities to improve the public realm and attract new visitors to the town. Other development opportunities are also being explored and will be hosted on the Shaping the Heart of Stroud website www.shapingtheheartstroud.org.

The challenge of many of our projects is to find timely funding and solutions which appeal to the whole community. The increased capacity within the office team has meant that we have been able to start many of the projects suggested by the NDP. The working group is due to set new targets for the coming year and to explore innovative solutions which will enable the Town Council to continue to improve the town centre for businesses, residents and visitors.

Kim Cowan, Project Officer



SUMMARY OF ACCOUNTS 2017-18

ACTIVITY	EXPENDITURE 2016-17	EXPENDITURE 2017-18
<i>Maintenance of cemeteries, recreation and play areas, floral displays, highways, footpaths and Sims Clock</i>	236,672	241,597
<i>Support for the arts, festivals, festive lights, town centre and regeneration including Lansdown Hall</i>	54,405	91,278
<i>Administration, including civic activities, mortgage, building maintenance, public advice, consultations, communications and community engagement</i>	258,252	284,785
<i>Community, including community grants</i>	71,808	70,057
<i>Planning consultations, including Neighbourhood Plan</i>	3,004	24
TOTAL	624,141	687,741
	INCOME 2016-17	INCOME 2017-18
<i>Precept</i>	521,428	560,080
<i>Cemetery</i>	30,105	33,405
<i>Agency services</i>	173,951	0
<i>Loan and capital receipts</i>	-	25,535
<i>Other income (grants and interest)</i>	19,533	26,056
TOTAL	745,017	645,076

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