

# **Stonehouse Neighbourhood Plan 2016-2031**

## **A report to Stroud District Council on the Stonehouse Neighbourhood Plan**

**Andrew Ashcroft  
Independent Examiner  
BA (Hons) MA, DMS, MRTPI**

**Director – Andrew Ashcroft Planning Limited**

**Executive Summary**

- 1 I was appointed by Stroud District Council in May 2017 to carry out the independent examination of the Stonehouse Neighbourhood Plan.
- 2 The examination was undertaken by written representations. I visited the neighbourhood plan area on 18 July 2017.
- 3 The Plan proposes a series of policies and seeks to bring forward positive and sustainable development in the Plan area. In particular, it proposes policies to safeguard Key Employment Sites, to designate local green spaces, to safeguard its historic environment and to promote walking and cycling.
- 4 The Plan has been significantly underpinned by community support and engagement. It seeks to achieve sustainable development in the plan area and which reflects the range of social, environmental and economic issues that it has identified.
- 5 Subject to the recommended modifications set out in this report I have concluded that the Stonehouse Neighbourhood Plan meets all the necessary legal requirements and should proceed to referendum.
- 6 I recommend that the referendum should be held within the neighbourhood plan area.

**Andrew Ashcroft**  
**Independent Examiner**  
**30 August 2017**

## **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 This report sets out the findings of the independent examination of the Stonehouse Neighbourhood Plan 2016-2031 (the Plan).
- 1.2 The Plan has been submitted to Stroud District Council (SDC) by Stonehouse Town Council in its capacity as the qualifying body responsible for preparing the neighbourhood plan.
- 1.3 Neighbourhood plans were introduced into the planning process by the Localism Act 2011. They aim to allow local communities to take responsibility for guiding development in their area. This approach was subsequently embedded in the National Planning Policy Framework in 2012 and which continues to be the principal element of national planning policy.
- 1.4 This report assesses whether the Plan is legally compliant and meets the Basic Conditions that apply to neighbourhood plans. It also considers the content of the Plan and, where necessary, recommends changes to its policies and supporting text.
- 1.5 This report also provides a recommendation as to whether the Plan should proceed to referendum. If this is the case and that referendum results in a positive outcome the Plan would then be used to determine planning applications within the plan area and will sit as part of the wider development plan.

## 2 The Role of the Independent Examiner

- 2.1 The examiner's role is to ensure that any submitted neighbourhood plan meets the relevant legislative and procedural requirements.
- 2.2 I was appointed by SDC, with the consent of the Town Council, to conduct the examination of the Plan and to prepare this report. I am independent of both SDC and the Town Council. I do not have any interest in any land that may be affected by the Plan.
- 2.3 I possess the appropriate qualifications and experience to undertake this role. I am a Director of Andrew Ashcroft Planning Limited. In previous roles, I have over 30 years' experience in various local authorities at either Head of Planning or Service Director level. I am a chartered town planner and have significant experience of undertaking other neighbourhood plan examinations and health checks. I am a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute and the Neighbourhood Planning Independent Examiner Referral System.

### *Examination Outcomes*

- 2.4 In my role as the independent examiner of the Plan I am required to recommend one of the following outcomes of the examination:
- (a) that the Plan is submitted to a referendum; or
  - (b) that the Plan should proceed to referendum as modified (based on my recommendations); or
  - (c) that the Plan does not proceed to referendum on the basis that it does not meet the necessary legal requirements.

### *The Basic Conditions*

- 2.5 As part of this process I must consider whether the submitted Plan meets the Basic Conditions as set out in paragraph 8(2) of Schedule 4B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. To comply with the basic conditions, the Plan must:
- have regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State; and
  - contribute to the achievement of sustainable development; and
  - be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the development plan in the area; and
  - be compatible with European Union (EU) and European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) obligations.

I have examined the submitted Plan against each of these basic conditions, and my conclusions are set out in Sections 6 and 7 of this report. I have made specific comments on the fourth bullet point above in paragraphs 2.6 to 2.10 of this report.

- 2.6 In order to comply with the Basic Condition relating to European obligations SDC carried out a screening assessment. The conclusion of the draft screening report

was that there were no significant environmental effects as a result of the production of the Plan.

- 2.7 The required consultation was carried out with the three prescribed bodies. All of the three consultation bodies were content with the outcome of the screening assessment.
- 2.8 SDC also carried out a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) screening report on the Plan. The screening report concluded that the Plan was not likely to have any significant effect on a European site. In reaching this conclusion the report comprehensively assessed the likely impact of the Plan on the Severn Estuary SAC/SPR/RAMSAR site, and two other SAC sites and a series of key wildlife sites and SSSIs. This conclusion was supported by Natural England.
- 2.9 Having reviewed the information provided to me as part of the examination I am satisfied that a thorough, comprehensive and proportionate process has been undertaken in accordance with the various regulations. The various reports set out a robust assessment of the relevant information. None of the statutory consultees have raised any concerns with regard to either neighbourhood plan or to European obligations. In the absence of any evidence to the contrary, I am entirely satisfied that the submitted Plan is compatible with this aspect of European obligations.
- 2.10 In a similar fashion I am satisfied that the submitted Plan has had regard to the fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and that it complies with the Human Rights Act. There is no evidence that has been submitted to me to suggest otherwise. There has been full and adequate opportunity for all interested parties to take part in the preparation of the Plan and to make their comments known. On this basis, I conclude that the submitted Plan does not breach, nor is in any way incompatible with the ECHR.

#### *Other examination matters*

- 2.11 In examining the Plan I am also required to check whether:
- the policies relate to the development and use of land for a designated neighbourhood plan area; and
  - the Plan meets the requirements of Section 38B of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (the Plan must specify the period to which it has effect, must not include provision about development that is excluded development, and must not relate to more than one neighbourhood area); and
  - the Plan has been prepared for an area that has been designated under Section 61G of the Localism Act and has been developed and submitted for examination by a qualifying body.
- 2.12 Having addressed the matters identified in paragraph 2.11 of this report I am satisfied that all of the points have been met subject to the contents of this report.

### 3 Procedural Matters

3.1 In undertaking this examination I have considered the following documents:

- the submitted Plan.
- the Basic Conditions Statement.
- the Consultation Statement
- the Stonehouse Town Character Assessment 2016
- the representations made to the Plan.
- the Stroud District Local Plan 2015
- the National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012).
- Planning Practice Guidance (March 2014 and subsequent updates).
- recent Ministerial Statements (March, May and June 2015).

3.2 I carried out an unaccompanied visit to the Plan area on 18 July 2017. I looked at its overall character and appearance and at those areas affected by policies in the Plan in particular. My site inspection is covered in more detail in paragraphs 5.9 to 5.16 of this report.

3.3 It is a general rule that neighbourhood plan examinations should be held by written representations only. Having considered all the information before me, including the representations made to the submitted plan, I was satisfied that the Plan could be examined in this fashion.

## 4 Consultation

### *Consultation Process*

- 4.1 Policies in made neighbourhood plans become the basis for local planning and development control decisions. As such the regulations require neighbourhood plans to be supported and underpinned by public consultation.
- 4.2 In accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 the Parish Council has prepared a Consultation Statement. This statement is very thorough, comprehensive and professionally-prepared. Its format and presentation is exemplary. In particular it includes three detailed appendices – a chronological schedule of all the consultation activities, a schedule of responses to the comments made at the draft plan stage and reproductions of the various press and publicity materials. The Statement (and its Appendix 2) sets out how the emerging plan took account of the various comments and representations received at the pre-submission phase of the Plan. This element of the Statement has been particularly helpful in my examination of the Plan.
- 4.3 Appendix 1 of the Statement sets out details of the wider consultation events that have been carried out as part the evolution of the Plan. The consultation events were well-structured and followed a clear sequence. Details are provided about:
- the launch events in 2014;
  - the vision and objective events in mid-2014;
  - extensive consultation with a wide variety of local groups in late 2014/early 2015;
  - the consultation events on emerging policies in late 2015/early 2016; and
  - the use of drop in events and information stalls.
- 4.4 Appendix 3 of the Consultation Statement provides very useful information about the methods of community engagement. It is helpfully supported by a range of photographs and reproductions of the various leaflets that were used. This provides a real depth and level of interest to the document.
- 4.5 It is clear that consultation has fundamentally underpinned the Plan's production. Advice on the neighbourhood planning process has been made available to the community in a positive and direct way by those responsible for the Plan's preparation. Consultation and feedback has been at the heart of the Plan throughout the various stages of its production.
- 4.6 The positive approach that was taken in responding to the earlier comments is reflected in the very focused set of representations to the submitted plan (see 4.8 below).
- 4.7 From all the evidence provided to me as part of the examination, I can see that the Plan has promoted an inclusive and comprehensive approach to seeking the
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opinions of all concerned throughout the process. SDC has carried out its own assessment that the consultation process has complied with the requirements of the Regulations.

#### *Representations Received*

4.8 Consultation on the submitted plan was undertaken by the District Council for a six-week period and which ended on 17 May 2017. This exercise generated comments from various persons and organisations:

- Sport England
- Marine Management Organisation
- Highways England
- Natural England
- Historic England
- Gloucestershire County Council
- Environment Agency
- Network Rail
- Robert Hitchins Limited
- Stroud District Council

4.9 In examining the Plan I have taken account of all the representations received. In some cases, I have highlighted specific representations in this report where it is both appropriate and relevant to do so.



## 5 The Plan Area and the Development Plan Context

### *The Plan Area*

- 5.1 The Plan area is located in the central part of Stroud District and to the immediate west of Stroud. It comprises of the whole of the Stonehouse parish. In 2011, it had a population of 7725 people. It was designated as a neighbourhood area on 12 September 2013.
- 5.2 The Plan area is very distinctive. It is primarily based on the built-up area of Stonehouse and includes both the Stroudwater Navigation Canal and the River Frome to the south of the town centre. At the heart of the town is a vibrant High Street containing a wide variety of retail, commercial and other services for the local community.
- 5.3 The Plan area includes several distinctive features which translate into specific policies. The town itself is the principal focus of development in the Plan area. Its form and character is influenced by the two railway lines that pass through the town. The southern part of the Plan area is defined by the waterways described above. The western part of the Plan area is dominated by its industrial and business areas. These are important both locally and in a wider District context in providing high quality jobs and economic prosperity. Located to the west of the Plan area the M5 provides the Plan area with excellent access to the strategic highway network.

### *Development Plan Context*

- 5.4 The development plan context is comprehensive and has provided a clear framework for the preparation of the neighbourhood plan.
- 5.5 The Stroud District Local Plan was adopted in November 2015. It provides an up to date context against which the Plan can be assessed as part of the basic conditions. All the policies in the Local Plan are strategic policies for the purpose of neighbourhood planning.
- 5.6 The neighbourhood area is affected directly and indirectly by a series of Core Policies in the Local Plan. Core Policy CP3 sets out a settlement hierarchy for the District. Stonehouse falls within the first of five tiers of settlements described as 'Accessible Local Service Centres'. The Plan comments that these settlements are the District's main towns and the primary focus for growth and development. They will continue to provide significant levels of jobs and homes. Core Policy CP4 provides particularly useful guidance to the Plan. It seeks to bring forward high quality and distinctive development. Proposals are expected to be integrated into the neighbourhood concerned, to protect and enhance a sense of place and to create safe streets, homes and workplaces. Several of the Plan's policies are designed to achieve this purpose.

5.7 The Plan area falls within the Stonehouse cluster in the Local Plan. The Local Plan contains eight mini place making plans which address specific parts of the District. The vision for this particular cluster includes the delivery of mixed use development as set out in Policy SA2 on land to the west of the town. Paragraph 3.17 of the Local Plan sets out a range of guiding principles for development in this mini plan area. They include:

- The retention of the physical distinctiveness of the town;
- A focus on canal and canal corridor conservation;
- The enhancement of existing transport links;
- Town centre and public realm improvements;
- Securing high quality design in keeping with local character and identity.

5.8 The Local Plan also includes an extensive range of other related policies. The following policies have a particular impact on the Plan:

Core Policy CP12	Town Centres and Retailing
Delivery Policy EI1	Key Employment Sites
Delivery Policy EI4	Provision and protection of railway stations and halts

#### *Site Visit*

5.9 I carried out an unaccompanied visit to the Plan area on 18 July 2017. I approached the Plan area from the west off the M5. In doing so I was able to see the relationship between the town and this important transportation system.

5.10 I looked initially at the employment areas in the west of the neighbourhood area. I saw the variety of industrial units and their interesting layout around the Oldends Lane/Brunel Way loop. This part of the visit helped me to understand the significance of these employment sites to the economy of both the Plan area and the wider Stroud District.

5.11 I then looked at the area to the south of the town centre. I saw the significance of the A419 Bristol Road connecting the M5 to Stroud and beyond. I also saw the importance of the Stroudwater Navigational canal. I took the opportunity to walk along its towpath from Downton Road to the iconic Nupend House. In doing so I saw the very well-equipped children's play area off Wharfdale Way.

5.12 I then walked into High Street via Regent Street. I saw the wide range of fine stone and brick houses, the Regent Street surgery and the Hopeland School buildings.

5.13 I took some time to look at the wide range of retail, commercial and administrative buildings in the town centre in general, and in High Street in particular. The scale and significance of the buildings reflected its former importance as a strategic road until the new A419 was constructed. They ranged from the timber-framed Tudor House to the former Police Station and courts to the Crown and Anchor Hotel (and now

occupied by a doctors' surgery). The well-maintained and impressive milestone reinforced that the town is 9 miles from Gloucester and 31 miles from Bath.

- 5.14 I then continued my visit by walking up to the railway station and then into Verney Road. I saw that the station was both well-maintained and well-used. I also saw that the bridge from one platform to the other also provided an effective pedestrian connection into the north-eastern part of the town. As I walked through Burdett Road I saw a range of very pleasant brick houses with stone detailing. I also saw the very distinctive and ornate central downpipe proudly sitting on the front elevation of 8-10 Burdett Road.
- 5.15 As part of my tour around the Plan area I looked at the range of local green spaces as identified in Policy ENV3.
- 5.16 In order to get a full impression of the Plan area I drove around the local road network including along the A419 into Stroud. This helped me to understand the connection and transport links between these two principal settlements in the District.

## 6 The Neighbourhood Plan as a whole

- 6.1 This section of the report deals with the submitted neighbourhood plan as a whole and the extent to which it meets the basic conditions. The submitted Basic Conditions Statement has helped considerably in the preparation of this section of the report. It is a well-presented, informative and professional document.
- 6.2 The Plan needs to meet all the basic conditions to proceed to referendum. This section provides an overview of the extent to which the Plan meets three of the four basic conditions. Paragraphs 2.6 to 2.10 of this report have already addressed the issue of conformity with European Union legislation.

### *National Planning Policies and Guidance*

- 6.3 The key elements of national policy relating to planning matters are set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) issued in March 2012.
- 6.4 The NPPF sets out a range of core land-use planning principles to underpin both plan-making and decision-taking. The following are of particular relevance to the Plan area:
- a plan led system– in this case the relationship between the neighbourhood plan and the adopted Local Plan
  - proactively driving and supporting economic development to deliver homes, businesses and industrial units and infrastructure.
  - Contributing to conserving and enhancing the natural environment
  - Conserving heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance
- 6.5 Neighbourhood plans sit within this wider context both generally, and within the more specific presumption in favour of sustainable development, which is identified as a golden thread running through the planning system. Paragraph 16 of the NPPF indicates that neighbourhoods should both develop plans that support the strategic needs set out in local plans and plan positively to support local development that is outside the strategic elements of the development plan.
- 6.6 In addition to the NPPF I have also taken account of other elements of national planning policy including Planning Practice Guidance and the ministerial statements of March, May and June 2015.
- 6.7 Having considered all the evidence and representations available as part of the examination I am satisfied that the submitted Plan has had regard to national planning policies and guidance in general terms. It sets out a positive vision for the future of the plan area and promotes sustainable growth. At its heart are a suite of policies that aim to safeguard key employment sites and to designate local green

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spaces. It also includes important policies to safeguard the town's rich built heritage. Appendix B of the Basic Conditions Statement helpfully maps the Plan policies with the appropriate paragraphs in the NPPF.

- 6.8 At a more practical level the NPPF indicates that plans should provide a clear framework within which decisions on planning applications can be made and that they should give a clear indication of how a decision-maker should react to a development proposal (paragraphs 17 and 154). This was reinforced with the publication of Planning Practice Guidance in March 2014. Its paragraph 41 (41-041-20140306) indicates that policies in neighbourhood plans should be drafted with sufficient clarity so that a decision-maker can apply them consistently and with confidence when determining planning applications. Policies should also be concise, precise and supported by appropriate evidence.
- 6.9 As submitted the Plan does not fully accord with this range of practical issues. The majority of my recommended modifications in Section 7 relate to matters of clarity and precision. They are designed to ensure that the Plan fully accords with national policy.

*Contributing to sustainable development*

- 6.10 There are clear overlaps between national policy and the contribution that the submitted Plan makes to achieving sustainable development. Sustainable development has three principal dimensions – economic, social and environmental. It is clear that the submitted Plan has set out to achieve sustainable development. In the economic dimension, it includes policies to safeguard employment sites (EM1/2), to support small and medium sized businesses (EM3) and to support communication and connectivity infrastructure (EM4). In the social role, it includes policies to safeguard and promote community facilities (AF1/2) and to meet local housing need (H1). In the environmental dimension, the Plan positively promotes high quality design (ENV7), identifies local green spaces (ENV3) and seeks to protect heritage assets in general, and those of the Canal in particular (ENV4/5). These and other matters are helpfully set out in Appendix E of the Basic Conditions Statement.

*General conformity with the strategic policies in the development plan*

- 6.11 I have already commented in detail on the development plan context in the wider Stroud District area in paragraphs 5.4 to 5.8 of this report.
- 6.12 I consider that the submitted Plan delivers a local dimension to this strategic context and supplements the detail already included in the adopted development plan. I am satisfied that the Plan is in general conformity with the strategic policies in the development plan. There are several areas where it appropriately adds local detail to Local Plan policies.

## 7 The Neighbourhood Plan policies

- 7.1 This section of the report comments on the range of policies in the Plan. In particular, it makes a series of recommended modifications to ensure that the various policies have the necessary precision to meet the basic conditions.
- 7.2 My recommendations focus on the policies themselves given that the basic conditions relate primarily to this aspect of neighbourhood plans. In some cases, I have also recommended changes to the associated supporting text.
- 7.3 I am satisfied that the content and the form of the Plan is fit for purpose. It is thorough and distinctive to the Plan area. Other than to ensure compliance with national guidance I do not propose that major elements of the Plan are removed or that new sections are included. The Town Council has spent considerable time and energy in identifying the issues and objectives that it wishes to be included in the Plan. This gets to the heart of the localism agenda.
- 7.4 The Plan is commendable to the extent that its focus is on land use policies. This approach directly reflects Planning Practice Guidance (41-004-20140306) which indicates that neighbourhood plans must address the development and use of land. Section 4 goes on to highlight some priority projects which are not in themselves land use in nature. This is appropriate and is anticipated in national policy.
- 7.5 I have addressed the policies in the order that they appear in the submitted plan. In some cases, there are overlaps between the different policies.
- 7.6 For clarity this section of the report comments on all policies whether or not I have recommended modifications to ensure that the Plan meets the basic conditions.
- 7.7 Where modifications are recommended to policies they are highlighted in bold print. Any associated or free-standing changes to the text of the Plan are set out in italic print.

### Sections 1 and 2 of the Plan

- 7.8 These introductory elements of the Plan set the scene for its detailed policies. They do so in a concise and proportionate way. The Plan is very well-presented and arranged and is supported by well-chosen photographs and diagrams. The photographs in particular add value and depth to the text throughout the Plan. The whole effect is exemplary. It demonstrates that significant care and attention has been given to the Plan. It also adds to its attractiveness and legibility.
- 7.9 The Introduction to the Plan (Section 1) provides a very clear context to the role and purpose of neighbourhood planning and to the designation of the neighbourhood plan area. It also sets out a good summary of how the Plan has been developed. Section

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1.3 provides a very proportionate and well-constructed outline of the neighbourhood area. Section 1.6 provides a connection to the adopted Local Plan. Section 2 sets out the vision and objectives for the Plan area. It helpfully describes the key findings that have underpinned the development of the Plan in general, and its policies in particular.

- 7.10 These introductory sections demonstrate that the Plan has been prepared and submitted in a professional way. The policies are set out in Section 3. They have been developed in an iterative fashion and are the outcome of proper research and an assessment of available information. The policies are arranged so that they sit within the context provided by the five themes in the Aims and Objectives section.

#### Policies in General

- 7.11 The presentation of the Plan makes a clear contrast between the policies themselves and the supporting text. This will ensure that decision-makers have clarity on the policies in the Plan. In appropriate circumstances, the policies are criteria-based. The adoption of this approach will provide useful long-term clarity for decision makers, local residents and land owners alike. The Plan has been the subject of a health check. This is reflected in the generally robust nature of its policies.

#### Policy AF1: Protecting Community Facilities

- 7.12 The policy sets out the Plan's approach towards the protection of existing community uses. It is underpinned with a significant amount of supporting information. The importance of this policy reflects its comment that 'there is a strong community spirit in Stonehouse'.
- 7.13 The structure of the policy is essentially formed of two related points. The first part establishes a general degree of protection for existing community facilities. The second part of the policy then identifies a list of eight 'particularly valued community amenities and facilities'. A third part of the policy then clarifies that the loss of identified community facilities (in the second part of the policy) will not be supported.
- 7.14 Plainly the second part of the policy has the clarity required by the NPPF. It will be immediately obvious to all concerned which facilities are affected by the policy. The first part of the policy is far less clear both in general terms and in establishing what facilities existed at any time. I sought clarification from the Town Council on this matter. It advised that it had intended to safeguard all community facilities in the town (in accordance with policy EI6 of the Local Plan). Its formulation of the neighbourhood plan had identified eight specific facilities that are considered to be locally valued. I recommend a modification to the policy so that it achieves this objective. Plainly the policy cannot directly introduce degrees of control for the various facilities. Nevertheless, as a result of the public feedback into this part of the Plan it would be appropriate to highlight the particular importance of the eight facilities in the supporting text.

- 7.15 The submitted policy refers the need for any proposals that would replace community facilities to satisfy identified local plan policies. Whilst this is not ideal it has the clarity required by the NPPF. In any event it will avoid the need to repeat one policy in the other.

**Replace the policy with the following:**

**Existing community facilities should be safeguarded and protected.**

**Where planning permission is required, proposals which would involve the loss of existing community facilities will only be supported where they satisfy the various criteria in policies E16 (community buildings) and ES13 (Open spaces) of the Stroud Local Plan.**

*Insert the following additional paragraph in the Justification after the existing first paragraph:*

*Policy AF1 sets out the Plan's approach to this important matter. It reflects the approach already adopted in the Stroud Local Plan. Community consultation has highlighted eight facilities in the town that are considered to be particularly locally valued community facilities as follows [list here i) to viii)]*

Policy AF2: Additional Community Facilities

- 7.16 This policy follows on from the previous policy. In this case the policy is based around a positive promotion of new and/or improved community facilities. Such an approach is entirely appropriate. It reflects the distinctive nature of the town and its strong sense of community.
- 7.17 The policy sets out a series of well-constructed criteria that any such proposals would need to meet. They are appropriate to the Plan area. The fourth criterion addresses water related issues (run-off, quality and flood risk). However, the format of this criterion is both different to the other three and does not have the clarity required by the NPPF. It requires that proposals should 'adequately' address such issues without identifying what would be required. I recommend a modification to address this point.

**Replace criterion iv) with the following:**

**'The proposal would not have significant detrimental impacts on surface water run-off, water quality or flood risk in the immediate vicinity of the site'.**

Policy AF3: Design and quality in the town centre

- 7.18 This policy addresses a series of issues. At its heart is a wish to retain the breadth and variety of the retail offer in the town centre, to increase the variety of goods available and to improve the wider quality of the retail environment. These ambitions reflect the strong sense of community that I saw on my visit to the Plan area and its inherent sustainability and self-sufficiency for day-to-day goods and services. The policy has the clear ability to contribute to the achievement of all three components of sustainable development in the Plan area.

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- 7.19 The first part of the policy includes several elements of supporting text which add little value. I recommend accordingly and to ensure that the policy has the clarity required by the NPPF.
- 7.20 The second part of the policy welcomes proposals that would increase the diversity of retail provision and which would occupy vacant floor space above shops and other commercial uses in the town centre. I recommend modifications to this part of the policy so that it acknowledges that not all the potential proposals that may arise would need planning permission. This point was acknowledged by the Town Council in its helpful response to my clarification note. This would particularly be the case where an existing retail unit changed the type of goods it offered. I also recommend that the policy should offer 'support' rather than 'encouragement'. This will bring the clarity to the policy that is required by the NPPF.

**In the first part of the policy delete:**

**In i) 'where people.... facade'**

**In ii) to improve.... safety'**

**Replace the second part of the policy with two separate paragraphs as follows:  
'Insofar as planning permission is required proposals which would increase the diversity of the retail provision in the town centre will be supported'.**

**'Insofar as planning permission is required proposals for the use of upper floors in the town centre will be supported where they comply with the criteria set out in the first part of this policy'.**

Policy T1: Pedestrian Routes

- 7.21 This policy sets out to address a series of factors. At the heart of the policy is a wish to safeguard existing pedestrian routes and to support new ones that may either arise in their own right or as part of development proposals. It respects the fact that the town is sufficiently small and flat for most residents to have the ability to access key facilities on foot.
- 7.22 The first and fourth components of the policy meet the basic conditions. Respectively they address the protection of existing rights of way and the realignment of footpaths where this is necessary as a result of new development.
- 7.23 The second component of the policy addresses improvements to existing routes. It is a general supporting policy. Its focus is on prioritising such improvements. However, the policy provides no context to any priority within such routes or against other similar works. In order to bring clarity to this part of the policy I recommend that the word 'prioritised' should be replaced with 'supported'.
- 7.24 The third component of the policy refers to proposals which may result in the closure of pedestrian routes and how future access should be handled. However, it is not clear what this policy is seeking to achieve. In any event its two elements contradict

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one another. On this basis, I recommend that the component is deleted. Its overarching ambition is largely safeguarded by the application of the first and fourth components of the wider policy.

**In the second component of the policy replace ‘prioritised’ with ‘supported’.  
Delete the third component of the policy.**

Policy T2: New Development and Pedestrian Links to the town centre

- 7.25 The policy sets out an expectation that new development will provide safe and convenient access to the town centre. It highlights that the town is divided by its principal roads and the two railway lines. The policy has been designed to give a local delivery tool to Policy EI12 of the Local Plan.
- 7.26 The supporting text recognises that developments close to the town centre will be better-placed to meet the expectations of this policy. It then acknowledges that it is likely that any development will be on the edge of the town. In this regard, the text then highlights the strategic importance of the delivery of the mixed-use allocation in the Local Plan to the west of the town (Policy SA2). The separation of this site from the town centre by the Gloucester to Bristol railway line is specifically referenced.
- 7.27 This is an area where the emerging neighbourhood plan has been overtaken by events. In April 2016 outline planning permission was granted by SDC for the development of this strategic allocation. That planning permission includes conditions relating to pedestrian and cycling accessibility. On this basis, the development of that site is now a commitment. It would also be unreasonable for the Plan to introduce an additional raft of requirements for the site’s eventual development over and above those already imposed by SDC (by way of conditions as part of the planning permission) on the basis of its application of adopted Local Plan policies. I recommend modifications to the supporting text to clarify this matter.
- 7.28 The policy itself is appropriate within the context of the geography of the town. In addition, it is designed to be operated in a flexible way to reflect the location and size of the potential sites themselves and the range of opportunities that may or may not exist to connect them to the town centre and to other principal facilities. I recommend modifications so that the policy has the clarity required by the NPPF. There is no need for the policy itself to refer directly to a Local Plan policy. In addition, I recommend that the focus on ‘encouraging’ proposals to provide the necessary links is replaced with a focus on them being ‘supported’. This will provide a more permissive focus to the policy.

**Replace ‘In line.... encouraged to’ with ‘New developments will be supported where they’**

**In the second part of the policy criterion ii) delete ‘(where feasible and viable)’**

*After the second sentence of the Justification include:*

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*Policy T2 of this Plan provides a local delivery tool to Policy E112 of the Local Plan. It reflects the geography of the town.*

*Replace the final section of the Justification (from Site Allocation Policy SA2 to policy E112 of the Local Plan) with:*

*'The strategic allocation identified in the Stroud Local Plan (Land to the west of Stonehouse Policy SA2) for new residential and employment development was granted outline planning permission in April 2016. It includes its own proposals for pedestrian and cycle access. These details will be clarified as the District Council makes decisions on the various reserved matters applications'.*

#### Policy T3: Design of Off-Road Pedestrian and Cycle Routes

- 7.29 This policy sets out a series of requirements for any new or improved cycle and pedestrian routes that are provided or incorporated within development proposals.
- 7.30 As with Policy T2 it reflects the compact size and geography of the town and the desirability of providing non-car modes of transport. It meets the basic conditions.

#### Policy T4: Proximity of new development to facilities and services

- 7.31 This policy looks to ensure that new development is accessible to existing facilities and services in the town. It reinforces the community and accessibility approach that underpins the wider Plan.
- 7.32 I recommend that the policy is modified so that it adopts a simpler format. As submitted it is somewhat confusing and as a result does not have the clarity required by the NPPF. I also recommend that its approach and title is modified so that it refers to 'accessibility' rather than to 'proximity'. Whilst the two factors are closely related accessibility is a factor that can be directly influenced by the planning system.

#### **Replace the opening part of the policy with:**

**Where appropriate new development should be designed to enhance accessibility to local facilities and services. Particular attention should be paid to:**

**In criterion i) replace 'the defined.... sequentially' with 'the travel hierarchy considering sequentially'**

**In criterion ii) insert 'the creation of' at its start.**

**Delete the final paragraph of the policy**

*Insert the following additional paragraph of supporting text at the end of the Justification:*

*In circumstances where a design and access statement or a travel plan is required as part of a planning application the documents concerned should address the issues in this policy.*

#### Policy T5: Existing Cycle Routes

- 7.33 The policy sets out to respond to strategic guidance in the adopted Local Plan on the importance of promoting and safeguarding cycle routes.
- 7.34 As submitted there is a disjoint between the policy and its justification. The former concentrates exclusively on development proposals that would result in the closure or the diversion of such a facility. The justification (and indeed the context provided by the Local Plan) has a focus both on safeguarding existing routes and providing a supporting context for the provision of new facilities. I recommend a modification to the policy to address this matter. The resulting policy is more positive. It also responds to the representations made by SDC and Robert Hitchins Limited on this policy.

**Replace the policy with the following:**

**‘Development proposals for new and amended cycle routes will be supported where:**

- **There is no net loss to the effectiveness of the existing cycle network;**
- **Provision is made for accessibility to motor scooters; and**
- **They have been designed or adapted to act as wildlife corridors (where feasible and viable)’.**

Policy T6: New Developments and cycle links to the town centre

- 7.35 This policy continues the strong theme of promoting cycle links from new development to the town centre. It requires that new development will be required to provide safe convenient and pleasant cycle routes where it is appropriate to do so. The second half of the policy sets out specific requirements in the event that the routes are located off-road.
- 7.36 I am satisfied that the principle of the policy meets the basic conditions. The promotion of sustainable transportation measures has regard to national policy. The policy is also in general conformity with strategic policies in the development plan. In addition, the policy takes appropriate account of the geography of the town and has sufficient flexibility to be applied on a case-by-case basis. Nevertheless, its first component is wordy and includes elements that are best captured in the justification to the policy. I recommend accordingly. The combined effect of the modifications will be to bring the type of clarity to the policy as required by the NPPF.

**Replace the first part of the policy to read:**

**‘Where appropriate new development will be required to provide safe, convenient and pleasant cycle routes either on quiet roads or off-road. Where possible and deliverable, and where the location of the proposal generates a need, routes should be provided to the town centres and to principal facilities including local schools. Routes should include safe and convenient crossings of roads and railways where necessary.’**

*At the end of the Justification add:*

*Policy T6 sets out a context within which strategic policies can be implemented in the neighbourhood area. It has been designed to be applied in a flexible way to reflect the scale of the development concerned and the opportunities that exist for its connection to the town centre and other facilities.*

#### Policy T7: Cycle Parking

- 7.37 The policy sets out to achieve two things. Firstly, it seeks to safeguard existing cycle parking and secondly it supports the provision of new facilities. It continues the approach set out in this initial part of the Plan.
- 7.38 The policy is written initially in a negative rather than a positive fashion. I recommend that this matter is remedied by reversing the position of its two component parts. In their separate ways both components otherwise meet the basic conditions.

**Reverse the respective positions of the two component parts of the policy.**

#### Policy T8: Improving Key Pedestrian and cycling routes

- 7.39 The policy supports the development of a series of improved key pedestrian and cycle links. The proposed links are appropriate and reflect the geography of the town as described earlier in this report.
- 7.40 I have taken into account the representations made by Robert Hitchens Limited on this matter. Nevertheless, the policy does not directly seek to impose further requirements on the development of the strategic allocation to the west of the town (and which already has outline planning permission).
- 7.41 The second part of the policy requires any proposals to 'pay particular attention' to Gloucestershire County Council standards. As submitted this part of the policy does not have the clarity required by the NPPF. I recommend accordingly.

**In the second part of the policy replace 'pay particular attention to' with 'be in accordance with'.**

#### Policy T9: Railway Station

- 7.42 This policy has a focus on the existing railway station in Burdett Road. It supports improved facilities at this important transport hub in the town. Their development would plainly extend the use and attractiveness of the existing station.
- 7.43 The submitted policy contains elements of supporting text within the policy. I recommend accordingly to address this matter. I also recommend a modification to correct a factual error in the Justification.

**Replace the first part of the policy with the following:**

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**‘Proposals for additional station amenities and for improved access at the Burdett Road railway station and its associated land as shown on Map 5 will be supported.’**

*At the end of the second paragraph of the Justification add:*

*There is considerable potential to introduce additional station amenities and to improve accessibility. In particular the station would benefit from having improved access for people with disabilities and for cycle parking.*

*In the final paragraph of the justification replace T9 with T8*

Policy T10: Loss of parking capacity

- 7.44 The policy seeks to safeguard the capacity of off-street car parking in the town centre. I saw the need for this policy when I visited the Plan area. Whilst accessibility on foot is good there were those who travelled to the town centre by car and who therefore needed access to good short-stay car parking.
- 7.45 I recommend modifications to the policy so that it can achieve its desired objective. As SDC point out there is no direct means by which off-street car parking can be protected as envisaged by the submitted policy. The modified policy reflects the opportunities that may exist for replacement parking facilities as part of wider development proposals.

**Modify the policy to read:**

**‘Development that results in the loss of existing off-street town centre car parking will only be supported where suitable and accessible replacement facilities are provided, or where it can be demonstrated that the parking spaces proposed to be lost are no longer needed.’**

Policy H1: Local needs housing

- 7.46 This policy offers support to new housing proposals which meet local housing needs in the town. It draws particular attention to the need for bungalows and smaller dwellings for young persons.
- 7.47 The proposal has generated a representation from Robert Hitchins Limited. It draws attention to the existing outline permission for the strategic mixed development site to the west of the town and the extent to which it addresses such needs. The Town Council has clarified that the policy is intended to apply to future developments. I recommend a modification to the supporting text to reflect this situation.
- 7.48 I also recommend that the final part of the policy is deleted. It is not necessary for a neighbourhood plan directly to repeat a local plan policy.

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### Delete the final paragraph of the policy

*At the end of the final paragraph of the Justification include:*

*The policy applies only to new development that may come forward within the Plan period. It does not affect the existing outline planning permission on land to the west of Stonehouse.*

Policy H2: Ease of access in new residential development

- 7.49 The policy sets out a series of requirements for the layout of and levels of access within new residential developments. It addresses the related issues of access for service vehicles, the Gloucestershire Manual for Streets and for safe access for pedestrian and cyclists. The underlying objective of the policy is to reduce on street car parking.
- 7.50 I am satisfied that the purpose of the policy is appropriate for the Plan area and in general terms meets the basic conditions. Within this overall context I recommend that it makes explicit reference to SDC car parking standards. The measures identified in the policy will be unlikely to achieve their desired outcomes if the inherent design and layout of the residential proposals concerned do not provide for their own car parking requirements. I also recommend a modification to the third part of the policy. As submitted it comments that developers ‘are encouraged to consider carefully’ the design and layout of development. This approach does not have the clarity required by the NPPF.

**Before the first component of the policy insert:**

**‘Proposals for housing development should provide off-street car parking spaces to meet current Stroud District Council parking standards.’**

**In the third part of the policy replace ‘are encouraged.... carefully’ with ‘should arrange’**

Policy H3: Play areas in new residential development

- 7.51 This policy sets out the Plan’s requirements for play areas in new residential development. It makes direct reference to policy ES15 of the adopted Local Plan.
- 7.52 As submitted the policy is not in general conformity with the equivalent Local Plan policy on two counts. In the first instance, it introduces a size threshold (10 or more dwellings) where the Local Plan policy applies to all developments. In the second instance, it does not make provision for the potential off-site provision of play spaces where circumstances would make that approach acceptable.
- 7.53 There would be a case for recommending the deletion of this policy. In any event with appropriate modifications it would largely repeat the adopted Local Plan policy. However, on balance I recommend that the policy is retained and modified so that it is in conformity with the adopted policy. Its justification refers to the ambition to allow

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children to play safely within the immediate area where they live and provides an example of local best practice.

**Replace the policy with the following:**

**‘Development proposals for new residential development should provide play space to meet the standards set out in policy ES15 of the Stroud Local Plan. Where the achievement of this standard is unrealistic or inappropriate within the boundaries of the development site a financial contribution will be sought in lieu of on-site provision. When new provision is provided appropriate measures will be sought to ensure the future satisfactory maintenance and management of the open space.’**

*At the end of the first section of the Justification add:*

*Policy H3 sets out the Plan’s approach to the need for play space. Ideally it should be provided within the boundaries of the site itself. However, there may be circumstances where the site is too small or where it would otherwise be inappropriate to provide play space on site. As such the policy sets out the opportunities for off-site contributions. These should be applied to the improvement or consolidation of existing play spaces that would be within realistic walking distance of the proposed residential development.’*

**Policy EM1: Safeguarding Local Employment Sites**

- 7.54 As its title suggests this policy sets out to safeguard identified employment sites in the town. It has the potential to be an important policy given the significance of the employment provision in Stonehouse both to its own needs and those of the wider District. It also has the ability to contribute significantly to the achievement of the economic dimension of sustainable development in the Plan area.
- 7.55 As submitted the policy is very extensive. It includes significant elements of supportive text that would sit far better in the justification section of the Plan. In addition, the policy identifies the five principal employment areas in the Plan area as ‘Local Employment Sites’. However, as SDC point out the five sites identified are identical to the sites in the town included within the schedule of ‘Key Employment Sites’ in Policy E11 of the Local Plan (sites EK26-EK30). On this basis, their separate designation in the submitted Plan is both unnecessary and potentially confusing. I also recommend that the title of the policy should be changed accordingly.
- 7.56 The policy also sets out a series of criteria against which proposals for new development will be assessed on these sites. Most of these criteria meet the basic conditions and will have the effect of stimulating further economic growth and development on the five sites concerned.
- 7.57 However, I recommend modification to two of the criteria. The first is in regard to criterion ii) which proposes a degree of flexibility for the change of use to alternative uses. Whilst that criterion incorporates viability issues and the need for a marketing period it is not in general conformity with Local Plan Policy E11. That policy adopts an

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absolute approach. In any event the Stonehouse sites are of major importance to the economy of the District and have excellent access to the M5 and the wider strategic highway network. On this basis, I recommend that the criterion is deleted. This would not directly prevent SDC from taking its own decision on a planning application where a viability case could be made for an appropriate alternative use.

- 7.58 The second is in regard to criterion iv) which supports the expansion of existing premises where there is a net increase in full time employment or where a business plan demonstrates the need for additional space. Plainly the expansion of employment premises would be appropriate subject to design and amenity issues (addressed elsewhere in the policy). Nevertheless, the specific issues identified by this criterion are unduly onerous. Some businesses may need to expand their premises to take account of new production process or to accommodate new orders. The approach in this criterion also is at odds with national policy. In particular paragraph 21 of the NPPF is very clear that ‘investment in business should not be over-burdened by the combined requirements of planning policy expectations’. The need for a business plan is also unnecessary. By definition the commercial operation concerned will have come to its own decision about the need for expansion. Thereafter it would be fall to SDC to consider any planning application that may be required purely on its planning merits. On this basis, I recommend that the criterion is simplified.

**Replace the policy to read:**

**Development proposals for employment use on the employment sites identified on Map 7 will be supported where they:**

- **Make more effective or efficient use of the site as employment land; or**
- **Provide complementary ancillary uses which improve the attractiveness of the employment sites; or**
- **Propose the expansion of existing premises; and**
- **Have no adverse impacts on the surrounding built character of the employment site concerned or its wider landscape setting; and**
- **Meet the requirements of relevant development plan policies**

*Change the title of the policy to ‘Safeguarding Key Employment Sites’.*

*Insert the following additional text in the Justification between the existing first and second paragraphs:*

*The existing key employment areas in Stonehouse are identified on Map 7 (see Appendix 2: Maps p.78). They are:*

- *Bonds Mill Industrial Estate*
- *Stonehouse Park*
- *Upper Mills Industrial Estate*
- *Oldends Lane Industrial Estate*
- *Ryeford Industrial Area*

*These sites are protected as Key Employment Sites in Local Plan Policy EI1. This protection recognises that the five sites provide significant employment opportunities for the Stonehouse Cluster, the wider District and the M5 corridor from Bristol to Gloucester and Cheltenham.*

Policy EM2: Resisting loss of employment space outside designated employment sites

7.59 This policy follows on from the approach adopted in Policy EM1. It seeks to exercise control over the potential loss of employment sites and premises beyond those identified as Key Employment Sites. In doing so it sets out a more flexible policy context than that set out in Policy EM1. This is both appropriate in its own right and has regard to paragraph 22 of the NPPF which highlights the need to promote alternative uses for land and buildings where there is no reasonable prospect of its use for employment purposes. Nevertheless, I recommend a modification so that the context of this policy is identical to that set in Policy EM1 with regard to the definition of Key Employment Sites.

7.60 The policy sets out three circumstances in which proposals for non-employment uses will be supported. The first is where a viability case can be made. The second is where the employment floorspace can be replaced. The third is where the proposed use would provide equal or greater benefits to the local economy and the community. I am satisfied that in principle the first and the second factors are appropriate. The third factor is however open to significant interpretation. The Justification offers no guidance on the matter or how this aspect of the policy would be applied by SDC as part of its wider development management functions. Whilst I have some sympathy for the approach adopted it does not have the clarity required by the NPPF and I recommend that it is deleted. Plainly SDC could consider any application which identified the type of alternative benefits proposed in the submitted policy on a case-by-case basis.

**Replace the initial part of the policy with:**

**‘Development proposals that would result in the loss of employment land outside that identified in the Key Employment Sites shown on Map 7 will be supported where:’**

**Replace criterion i) with:**

**It can be demonstrated that the use of the site or premises concerned solely for employment is no longer viable; or**

**Delete criterion iii)**

*Insert the following additional supporting text as a separate paragraph at the end of the Justification:*

*‘The policy sets out two circumstances in which the loss of employment sites or premises will be supported. In relation to the first point on viability any such planning application will be expected to demonstrate that a 12-month active marketing*

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*exercise has taken place for employment purposes on the open market at a realistic price and that no reasonable offers have been submitted’.*

#### Policy EM3: Supporting small and medium sized businesses

- 7.61 The policy supports the development of small and medium sized enterprises. It identifies a series of six environmental factors with which such proposals should comply. The policy has clear regard to national policy. The Plan recognises that its business parks and the historic mill complexes provide significant opportunities for the development of small businesses.
- 7.62 The policy requires that such proposals ‘demonstrate market demand’. For similar reasons to those that I have set out in regard to Policy EM1 this requirement is too onerous. New businesses will have come to their own judgements about the demands for their businesses. Some may be experimental. Some will flourish whilst other will fail in the first few years. These issues are matters of commercial judgement rather than of a planning nature. I recommend accordingly.
- 7.63 The Justification to the policy correctly identifies that the mill complexes in and around Stonehouse provide a wider range of employment opportunities. Nevertheless, a neighbourhood plan can only comment on development opportunities in its own defined area. On this basis, I recommend the deletion of the words ‘and around’.

#### **Delete ‘they demonstrate market demand and’**

*Delete ‘and around’ in the first paragraph of the Justification*

#### Policy EM4: Connectivity and Communications Infrastructure

- 7.64 This policy offers support to proposals that would improve broadband, telecommunications and ICT connectivity. It has the ability to contribute significantly to the achievement of the economic dimension of sustainable development in the Plan area.
- 7.65 The policy has appropriate regard to national policy. It meets the basic conditions.

#### Policy ENV1: Maintaining and protecting the natural environment

- 7.66 This policy seeks to ensure that development proposals conserve and where appropriate enhance the natural environment of the Plan area. It reasonably and appropriately makes specific reference to Key Wildlife Sites and to Priority Habitats. The second part of the policy highlights the need as appropriate for development proposals to identify and deliver mitigation measures. The policy has clear regard to national planning policy.

- 7.67 I recommend a modification to the second part of the policy to bring the clarity required by the NPPF. As submitted it includes a series of mitigation measures as examples.

**In the second part of the policy delete ‘for example’ and insert the following at the end of the policy ‘or other mitigation measures as appropriate to the particular proposal’.**

Policy ENV2: Green Infrastructure Network

- 7.68 This policy addresses the Green Infrastructure Network in the town. It is an extensively-worded policy which includes significant elements of supporting text. In effect, the policy indicates that development proposals that maintain and enhance this network will be supported.
- 7.69 On this basis I recommend that the policy is simplified and that the supporting text (currently located in the policy) is reproduced in the Justification. This will ensure that the policy has the clarity required by the NPPF. The Justification (as modified) will also provide the appropriate degree of explanation for the modified policy.

**Replace the policy with the following:**

**‘Development proposals that maintain and enhance the locally valued green and blue infrastructure network, as identified in Map 10, will be supported’.**

*Reposition the first four sentences of the policy as submitted to the beginning of the Justification section.*

Policy ENV3: Local Green Space

- 7.70 This policy designates five parcels of land as local green space. It does so within the context provided by paragraphs 76 to 78 of the NPPF. Their designation is underpinned by detailed information in the Plan’s evidence base. The policy is appropriately designed to safeguard the identified parcels of land as local green space. In particular the second part of the policy identifies the limited range of development that will be acceptable within local green spaces. They mainly relate to small scale proposals that would enhance the use of the spaces themselves and improve access to them. I looked at the five sites as part of my visit to the Plan area. In their different ways, I am satisfied that they meet the tests set out in the NPPF.
- 7.71 The policy provides a significant degree of detail and content. This is primarily on the basis that it includes the details that have caused the sites to be designated as local green space. This information would sit better in the Justification. This approach would bring the clarity required by the NPPF. I recommend accordingly.
- 7.72 The local green spaces are appropriately identified on a map base (Map 11). However, that map also shows a series of other environmental assets which are unaffected by policies in the Plan. This has the ability to introduce a lack of clarity on

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the role and significance of the various designations. This matter is reinforced by the initial wording of the policy itself. It conflates the wider issue of green infrastructure with the specific designation of local green spaces. To resolve this matter and to reflect the status provided by local green space designation I recommend that they are shown on a separate Map.

- 7.73 I also recommend a specific modification to criterion iii) of the second part of the policy. This would have the effect of making its application more general so that it has proper regard for national policy.

**Replace the first part of the policy to read:**

**Local Green Spaces are designated at the following locations as shown on Map [insert number]:**

- **Severn Road Park Estate Green**
- **Midland Road Park Estate Green**
- **Boakes Drive Green**
- **Verney Fields**
- **Court View Ponds**

**In the second part of the policy (criterion iii) replace ‘species’ with ‘biodiversity’.**

*Insert the following additional text at the end of the Justification section:*

*‘Five local green spaces are designated as follows. The reasons for their designation is shown in brackets. Further detail on the designation of the sites is included in the Plan’s evidence base. [List at this point a) to e) from the submitted policy]’*

*Include a separate map in the Plan identifying the local green spaces. Explanatory Note -this map should identify the five local green spaces by reference to their detail (a-e) in the policy. The map should be to a smaller scale than Map 11 so that the five sites can be accurately identified for development management purposes.*

Policy ENV4: Protecting the heritage assets of Stonehouse

- 7.74 This policy has been designed to protect local heritage assets in the town. It reflects its rich history in general terms and its industrial heritage in particular. Its principal focus is on local heritage assets.
- 7.75 The submitted documents included the Stonehouse Town Character Assessment. This document usefully describes character areas in the town and identifies important non-designated buildings that contribute towards its character. Appendix 3 (of the submitted neighbourhood plan itself) then identifies local heritage assets in each of the four character areas.
- 7.76 The policy and its justification are well-intentioned. Nevertheless, as submitted its format is rather confusing and the policy falls well-short of displaying the clarity required by the NPPF. In particular it does not have regard to national policy which
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indicates that the responsibility for preparing local lists rests with the local planning authority (here SDC). Both SDC and the Town Council have helpfully responded to my clarification note on this matter. SDC comments that it is intending to produce a local list for the wider District at some future point. The Town Council comments that it anticipates that the buildings identified in this Plan (Appendix 3) can eventually be incorporated into the emerging local list.

- 7.77 I recommend modifications to the policy and to the supporting text to address these matters and to bring the clarity required by the NPPF. In particular the recommended modifications remove any direct reference to a local list of heritage buildings. I also recommend that the policy is simplified by the deletion of its second part. In most cases the issues which it addresses are already covered by other policies in the Plan or other technical guidance. I also recommend that the buildings concerned are shown on a separate map.

**The buildings shown in Appendix 3 and on Map [insert number] are identified as important character buildings.**

**Proposals for the demolition, redevelopment or substantial alterations to the important character buildings should demonstrate the consideration that has been given to retaining:**

- **The important character building itself;**
- **Its most distinctive and important features;**
- **The positive elements of its setting and its relationship to its immediate surroundings; and**
- **The contribution that the building and its setting makes to the character of the local area.**

*In the supporting text (second paragraph) replace 'local heritage interest (see Appendix 3) which' with 'important character buildings. These buildings are shown in Appendix 3 of this Plan. They'*

*Delete the final sentence and replace with:*

*'The identification of these important character buildings does not constitute a local list of non-designated heritage assets. Stroud District Council is considering the preparation of such a local list for the wider district. Once that process begins the important character buildings in Appendix 3 of this Plan can be assessed for inclusion in that District-wide list on the criteria used as part of that exercise.'*

*Include an additional map in the Plan showing the buildings in this policy (and Appendix 3).*

Policy ENV5: Protecting and enhancing the Stroudwater Canal

- 7.78 This policy sets out a positive context within which the Canal can be safeguarded and improved. It provides a robust local dimension to policy ES11 of the Local Plan. It addresses accessibility issues and the provision of moorings.

- 7.79 The policy is both designed to be a free-standing policy and to sit within the wider context provided by the Cotswold Canal Trust's long-term vision of creating a navigable through route to the Rivers Thames and Severn. This wider vision is both visionary and exciting. Nevertheless, it is best expressed within the Justification rather than the policy itself. In any event many of its proposals will be outside the planning system in general, and outside the neighbourhood area in particular. I recommend accordingly. In doing so I recommend that the first three elements of the policy become three separate parts of the modified policy. In the third element of the policy I recommend a modification to its wording so that it has the clarity required by the NPPF. I recommend that the fourth element of the policy as submitted (its criterion iv) is deleted. There is no need for a neighbourhood plan to reiterate the need for proposals to comply with the adopted Local Plan.

**Delete the opening element of the policy.**

**Recast the policy so that it reads as three separate paragraphs beginning with: Opportunities to...**

**Proposals for moorings....**

**The provision of temporary moorings....**

**Delete the section of the policy beginning with iv) Development proposals....**

**In the third paragraph of the modified policy replace 'is likely to' with 'would'.**

*Insert the following additional text in the Justification after the existing first paragraph: 'The Neighbourhood Plan supports the wider ambitions of the Cotswold Canals Trust. This seeks to establish a navigable through route to the Rivers Thames and Severn. The policy provides a local context to assist this project and specifically to improve accessibility to the canal in Stonehouse'.*

Policy ENV6: Protecting views and vistas

- 7.80 This policy identifies a series of important public views and vistas that the Town Council wishes to safeguard. I saw several of the vistas on my visit to the Town. In some cases, they reflect the setting of the town below the Cotswold escarpment.
- 7.81 SDC comments that the policy duplicates the information on views and vistas contained within Map 13 and recommends that the policy is simplified. That approach would have its own merits. Nevertheless, it is not necessary to ensure that the policy meets the basic conditions.
- 7.82 I recommend a detailed modification to the second part of the policy to bring the clarity required by the NPPF.

**In the second part of the policy replace 'will need to' with 'should'.**

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### Policy ENV7: High Quality Design

- 7.83 This policy sets out the Plan's ambitions for high quality design. It seeks to provide a local dimension to national policy set out in the NPPF.
- 7.84 One representation has suggested that the policy should be deleted on the basis that it adds little to the design policy in the adopted Local Plan. I am not persuaded by that argument. As the Justification to the policy highlights the good design of buildings was supported during the consultation processes and good design can actively contribute towards the achievement of sustainable development.
- 7.85 One of the 12 core planning principles in the NPPF (paragraph 17) is '(always seek) to secure high-quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings'. The approach adopted in the policy has regard to the more detailed design elements of the NPPF. In particular, it sets out a positive requirement for high quality and inclusive design (paragraph 57), it develops a robust and comprehensive policy (paragraph 58), it proposes outlines of design principles (paragraph 59) and does so in a locally distinctive yet non-prescriptive way (paragraph 60).
- 7.86 I recommend a modification to criterion iv) to reflect the comments on the Plan made by SDC. As submitted the criterion is very specific to insects and nesting birds. It would be more applicable if it adopted a more general approach. That approach would not affect the ability to provide habitats for these two parts of the ecosystem in the Plan area. The wider approach would more properly have regard to national policy.

### **Replace criterion iv) with 'enhancing biodiversity'**

### Policy ENV8: Provision of private outdoor amenity space in new developments

- 7.87 This policy sets out the Plan's requirements for private outdoor amenity space. It confirms that this should normally be provided as a private rear garden. It largely restates existing Local Plan policies and Supplementary Planning Guidance. Nevertheless, it reinforces the importance the wider green infrastructure in the neighbourhood plan area.
- 7.88 The policy is well-designed and constructed without generally being overly-prescriptive. I recommend that the references to 'preferably rectangular' in the third paragraph and criterion i) is deleted. This element is too prescriptive and is contrary to the NPPF. It also has the ability to result in inappropriate designs if it was to be applied rigidly.

### **Delete '(preferably rectangular)' from the third paragraph.**

### Policy ENV9: Allotments

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7.89 This policy supports the development of additional allotments. It identifies four appropriate criteria against which proposals can be assessed.

7.90 The policy meets the basic conditions.

#### Other Matters

7.91 I have commented earlier that the submitted Plan concentrates on land-use matters in accordance with national policy and guidance. However, at the same time the development of the Plan has generated an interest in a series of non-land use matters. This approach is anticipated in national policy. Section 4 identifies a series of possible projects for community infrastructure levy funding (Section 4.1) and a series of other priorities (Section 4.2).

7.92 SDC suggests that the various projects in Section 4.1 should be included within the topic sections earlier in the Plan. This approach would have merit. However, it is not required to ensure that the Plan meets the basic conditions. Projects that may receive funding (such as improvements to the railway station) may need planning permission in their own right. Decisions of that nature would be taken by SDC on the basis of neighbourhood plan and other development plan policies.

7.93 Section 4.2 of the Plan lists a series of other priorities as follows:

- Maintenance of footpaths
- The introduction of an additional loop of the Cotswold Way into Stonehouse
- The protection and improvement of cycle routes
- Improvements to Oldends Lane
- Burdett Road station
- Local needs housing
- Canal related facilities
- Urban edges and gateways

7.94 I am satisfied that these other priorities are appropriate for inclusion in the Plan. They are properly located in a discreet section in its structure. They also clearly relate to and overlap with the range of land-use policies in the bulk of the Plan. They will contribute in their different ways to the promotion of sustainable development in the town.

7.95 For absolute clarity I recommend that some of the bold headings are modified so that they more fully describe their purpose (and as set out in each of the various headings) as follows:

*Replace:*

- *‘Cotswold Way’ with ‘The introduction of an additional loop of the Cotswold Way into Stonehouse’*

- *'Cycle Routes' with 'The protection and improvement of cycle routes'*
- *'Oldends Lane' with 'Improvements to Oldends Lane'*
- *'Housing' with 'Local needs housing'*

## **8 Summary and Conclusions**

### *Summary*

- 8.1 The Plan sets out a range of policies to guide and direct development proposals in the period up to 2031. It is thorough and distinctive in addressing a specific set of issues that have been identified and refined by the wider community.
- 8.2 Following my independent examination of the Plan I have concluded that the Stonehouse Neighbourhood Plan meets the basic conditions for the preparation of a neighbourhood plan subject to a series of recommended modifications.
- 8.3 This report has recommended a series of modifications to the policies in the Plan. Nevertheless, it remains fundamentally unchanged in its role and purpose.

### *Conclusion*

- 8.4 On the basis of the findings in this report I recommend to Stroud District Council that subject to the incorporation of the modifications set out in this report that the Stonehouse Neighbourhood Plan should proceed to referendum.

### *Referendum Area*

- 8.5 I am required to consider whether the referendum area should be extended beyond the Plan area. In my view, the neighbourhood area is entirely appropriate for this purpose and no evidence has been submitted to suggest that this is not the case. I therefore recommend that the Plan should proceed to referendum based on the neighbourhood area as approved by Stroud District Council on 12 September 2013.

Stonehouse Neighbourhood Plan – Examiner's Report

- 8.6 It is very clear that a huge amount of hard work and dedication has been put into the preparation of this Plan. I am grateful to everyone who has contributed towards the smooth delivery of the examination.

**Andrew Ashcroft**  
**Independent Examiner**  
**30 August 2017**