



STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Council Offices • Ebley Mill • Ebley Wharf • Stroud • GL5 4UB

Telephone 01453 766321

www.stroud.gov.uk

Email: democratic.services@stroud.gov.uk

Members of the Public's Questions to Council.

Questions from Steve Willetts
<p>Question 1</p> <p>Proposed Stroud District Local Plan - Budget and Costs What was the budget set to deliver the District Plan, how much has been spent to date and what now is the projected spend for the 6 months pause plan proposed to the Inspectors to try to deliver a sound plan?</p>
<p>Reply 1</p> <p>There was no budget set explicitly in 2017 to deliver the new Local Plan. There is an annual budget to deliver the range of Planning Strategy services including the Local Plan. That budget for 2023/24 is £103,200 (not including staffing resources). The Council also received £100,000 as part of a former Gloucestershire growth deal with Government to fund traffic modelling. The total costs for preparing the Local Plan to date (2017-2023) are approximately £787,300, including £140,400 covering Inspectors' costs, but not including staffing costs. The costs of the Action Plan will depend primarily upon the costs of further design work on the M5 junction improvement schemes, which have yet to be finalised.</p>
<p>Question 2</p> <p>Proposed Stroud District Local Plan - Resources What additional resource and capabilities (internal and external) were used to develop the pause plan, are proposed to deliver the pause plan and what is the impact of having to carry out the pause plan on other priorities and work plans?</p>
<p>Reply 2</p> <p>The Action Plan was developed by officers of the Council with support from the Council's transport consultant. The Action Plan identifies those organisations who will be involved in its delivery (see Action Plan second column). As the primary purpose of the Council's Local Plans team is to deliver the Local Plan, and the Action Plan will take place during a pause in the examination process, the delivery of the Action Plan will not impact on other priorities or work plans.</p>
<p>Question 3</p> <p>Proposed Stroud District Local Plan - Risks Please state the key risks that SDC has considered and explain; the actions that will be taken to minimise those risks both in terms of the plan itself and the ways of working and engagement to deliver a sound plan; the consequences to our communities if the work still does not satisfy the inspectors and what contingency plans and budgets will be put in place to minimise those consequences?</p>
<p>Reply 3</p> <p>The key risks associated with the preparation of the Local Plan have changed over time, depending upon the specific risks identified at each stage. At the current time the key risk is not achieving a positive outcome from the recent correspondence with the Inspectors and with that the consequential risks associated with not having an up to date policy framework to manage the development management process.</p>



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The actions associated with reducing the likelihood of this risk occurring involve seeking to address the Inspectors concerns as set out in their letter of 4 August 2023 and subsequent letter of 2 October 2023 through working with identified partners on a series of actions, as set out in the Action Plan of 12 September 2023. Beyond these actions, other actions include attending reconvened hearing sessions (if allowed) to put forward the Council’s case on the remaining matters; agreeing with the Inspectors a list of potential modifications to resolve soundness matters; and undertaking public consultation on these modifications in accordance with regulations and PINS procedures.

Should the Plan be found unsound by the Inspectors, there will be a risk of “planning by appeal” i.e. speculative development being promoted in the absence of a strategic policy framework. There would be two broad contingencies to mitigate the impacts: A programme and budget for commencing a new Local Plan to fill the policy gap; and an approach to managing development in the interim, which will involve a number of actions, including seeking to maintain a 5-year land supply by approving appropriate development through the development management process.

Questions from Paul Couple

Question 4

Given the likely outcome of the Government Inspector pausing the plan, can SDC confirm that they will enter into dialogue with parish communities to ensure that amendments considered are community led, and that SDC recognise that with government housing targets now removed, Parish Councils have the opportunity to reconfirm their estimates of required housing, and specifically the numbers required for affordable and social housing needs?

Reply 4

The Inspectors are currently considering the Council’s request for a 6 month pause to address the three specific issues raised in the Inspectors letter of 4 August 2023. These issues include specific concerns with allocations at Wisloe, Sharpness and the issue of impacts on the Strategic Road Network. The Council’s Action Plan sent to the Inspectors on 12 September 2023 sets out how the Council intends to address these issues but it will be for the Inspector’s to decide what actions will take place next.

Unless the Inspectors decide that the Local Plan should be withdrawn, there is no scope for the Council to enter into the sort of dialogue set out in the question, and whilst the Local Plan remains at examination or is subject to a pause, the only likely engagement envisaged by the Inspectors would be through public consultation on modifications.

The Government has not removed housing targets and examination hearing sessions have already been held on the District’s housing requirement. The Inspectors have already stated that they are confident that other matters are likely to be addressed through appropriate modifications, which the Inspectors will agree for consultation. It will be for the Inspectors to determine whether they wish to receive more evidence on housing needs and requirements, which is outside the control of the District Council.

Question 5

Further to the above, can SDC give parishes an undertaking that revised housing numbers will NOT be developer led on face value viability?

Reply 5



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If the Inspectors wish to receive further information on a revised housing supply, the Council will seek to provide the specific information requested by the Inspectors. Examination hearing sessions have already been held on the district's housing requirement. Any revised housing supply provided by the Council will be based upon proper planning considerations and will be subject to further examination, with the Inspectors likely to invite the views of others at the appropriate time. However, the views of developers are important in terms of demonstrating viability and deliverability and the Inspectors have previously spent some time at hearing sessions asking developers to provide detailed evidence on viability and deliverability. We would expect the Inspectors to follow the same process if a revised housing supply were to be identified.

Question 6

Will SDC acknowledge the importance of making the NDP for Cam the prime guide to ensure that the character and nature of the village is not further blighted by inappropriate over-development?

I would like to draw SDC's attention to CPC's environmental report in which a strong recommendation was to eliminate PS25 from the local plan as it was considered by both the community and CPC as hugely detrimental to the character and nature of Cam and due to the stated environmental impacts within that report commissioned at great public expense. Residents would far rather work with SDC who will find us far more supportive if these vitally important aspects are properly considered to achieve what is best for our community. Nothing about the current plan is good for Cam in terms of employment, schooling and other important infrastructure support, in solving current highways problems and in the hugely damaging impact on the character and nature of our village.

Reply 6

SDC acknowledges the important role of Neighbourhood Plans (including Cam NDP), in support of the Local Plan. National planning policy states that "Neighbourhood plans should support the delivery of strategic policies contained in local plans or spatial development strategies; and should shape and direct development that is outside of these strategic policies." (NPPF, para. 13)

Consequently, the Local Plan is the prime determination of the future scale and distribution of development within the district. NDPs, including Cam NDP, have a role in ensuring that the development allocated in the Local Plan is well designed and in managing development that is outside of the Local Plan.

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Members Questions to Council.

Question from Councillor Christopher Evans

Question 1

It is being advertised that The Pulse will be closed from 30th Oct 6th November for a new heating system to be installed. Whilst this is necessary work, it means an important service will be closed during half term week. Was the timing taken into consideration and could other dates have been chosen instead?

Reply 1

The installation of carbon saving technology at The Pulse in Dursley is part of a Council investment project with a total value of £5.33m. It has been enabled by our hard work and successful application for grant support from Salix (on behalf of the Department of Energy Security and Net Zero), of £4.691m. The scheme also includes Stratford Park Leisure Centre and The Museum in the Park. Once completed, this will result in an estimated annual carbon saving of 222 tonnes per year over the 20-year life of the equipment.

A requirement of the funding award, which was announced in January 2023, is that all work is completed by 31 March 2024.

The nature of the work makes it necessary for some periods of closure at each facility. While working to meet this exacting timescale, the programme has been planned to minimise disruption and impact on our communities. The dates for the closure of The Pulse were given careful consideration and although other dates were considered, the overall delivery schedule requires work be carried out between the 30 October and 6 November.

Works have been staggered so The Pulse and Stratford Leisure Centre are not closed at the same time. The pool at Stratford Park Leisure Centre will remain open during half-term and similarly, the Pulse will remain open when work is undertaken at Stratford Park Leisure Centre. There are banners up in The Pulse showing how to get to Stratford Park.

Delays to work at The Pulse would put pressure on the delivery of the overall scheme. The Pulse staff have made every effort to provide off-site children's activities during the closure period with activity days and dance workshops taking place at the Chantry centre in Dursley.

Activities include a Halloween Dance workshop: "A wickedly fun dance workshop where you will have the opportunity to learn a spooky Halloween dance routine."

And there is a Halloween Activity Day: "A day that's jam-packed with sports challenges, special Halloween-themed activities and crafts."

The swimming lessons are attended much less in the holiday period; it's not uncommon for no one to come along. October half term is particularly quiet as people tend to go away before Christmas and statistics show that numbers actually drop during the half term:

Week before half term – Total Footfall – 4522 (+500 School children)

Oct Half Term 2022 (24th Oct to 30th Oct) – Total Footfall 4281

Week after half term – Total Footfall – 4654 (+500 School children)

Disabled users come as part of schools, the Pulse work closely with many SEN schools, for example Cotswold Chine, Shrubberies, Hartmore. The Chine is there almost every day.

We have to remember that lots of people use the Pulse, for whom school holidays either do not signify, or actively make the leisure centre more difficult to access. Often classes don't go on during half term e.g. Cardiac and Cancer, Move it or Lose it, Respiratory Rehab. There are many elderly users, as well as families with pre-school children and babies, who find it more difficult to park during the school holidays.

Although general public pool activities will only be available at Stratford Park during half term, the closure at this time means our school Learn-to-Swim programme, which caters for approximately 500 children a week, will not be disrupted.

Question from Councillor Loraine Patrick

Question 2

As we are yet again looking to recruit a Senior Enforcement officer, are the numbers of enforcement cases stacking up again? How is this being addressed?

Reply 2

The post of Senior Enforcement Officer has been vacant since August 2023 and, following several recruitment campaigns across a range of media, we now have suitable candidates and hope to recruit to the role through an interview process, scheduled for early November 2023.

This vacancy reflects a particularly challenging environment for the recruitment and retention of planning and enforcement roles at the present time, not just in SDC but in neighbouring authorities and indeed nationwide.

Over the period that this post has been vacant, the Council's Development Management Team has been managing the enforcement caseload proactively, through a combination of team members covering wider duties and the targeted use of agency enforcement staff to work on priority cases. Through this proactive approach, the team closed more enforcement referrals during August and September than it received. The backlog in enforcement cases is also down overall, having reduced by over 50% since early May 2023.

Once the Senior Enforcement Officer post is filled, the team will continue to progress wider initiatives to reduce the backlog still further, for example through a repeat of the highly successful 'Enforcement Week' held in May 2023, focused on closing down long-standing cases. The publication of the Planning Enforcement Protocol in January 2023 has also put a renewed focus on the timely processing of enforcement referrals and empowered enforcement staff to apply planning judgement in their decision making.

Questions from Councillor Lindsey Green

Question 3

Can you tell us how many external funding opportunities there have been open to Stroud District Council over the last 2 years and out of that list how many have we applied for?

Reply 3

The Council has a successful track record of applying for grant funding to support the delivery of core Council services and the priorities within the Council Plan.

The Statement of Accounts give the totals of external funding received and these total £22.6 million over the last two years, including £5m in Central Government Covid support for the Council.

Many of the external funding opportunities arising for the Council are based on competitive bidding processes. SDC Officers look to explore any opportunities for additional funding which may be available, as long as it supports the existing priorities of the Council. Bidding for external funding, and delivering on grant funded programmes, is often complex and time consuming so

a key part of bidding is ensuring that grants targeted are those which sufficiently support Council activity. The Council's Leadership and Management Team have recently developed an updated set of operational guidance to ensure that grants are correctly targeted, recorded and reported.

Over the last two financial years the total received from competitive grant funding programmes is £13.2 million. These includes schemes where SDC has acted as the lead partner for County wide partnerships. Please refer to the following table for details of grants successfully acquired.

	£k
Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund Wave 1&2	3,524
Green Homes LADS3	514
Home Upgrade Grant 1&2	1,235
UK Shared Prosperity Fund	522
WECA 2030	175
Local Authority Housing Fund	2,392
LTA Tennis	102
Salix – Heating for Leisure Centres and Museum	4,691
	13,155

The abundance of external funding possibilities and sources mean that a complete list of funding opportunities that would have been available is not practically possible, but the list of funding received is constantly updated and further updates will come to relevant policy committees as part of the budget monitoring process.

Question 4

Will Stroud District Council be putting a funding bid together for projects that have district heating now that the Heat Network Efficiency Scheme Round 5 is now open to help with the Council's goals for decarbonisation?

Reply 4

Heat Network Efficiency Scheme funding has been previously considered as the Council has five district heating systems within our Independent Living schemes. A project reviewing the infrastructure and metering options for the district heat systems is currently underway, and this will include seeing if it would be possible to submit a funding bid to this grant scheme.

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