



STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

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ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 20 April 2021

7.00 - 10.54 pm

Remote Meeting

Minutes

Membership

Councillor Simon Pickering (Chair)

Councillor Paul Denney
Councillor Trevor Hall
Councillor Nick Hurst
Councillor Haydn Jones
Councillor Norman Kay

Councillor George James (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Skeena Rathor
Councillor Haydn Sutton
Councillor Jessica Tomblin
Councillor Chas Townley
Councillor Tim Williams

*= Absent

Officers in Attendance

Chief Executive
Strategic Director of Place
Monitoring Officer
Head of Community Services
Community Services Manager
Head of Planning Strategy

2030 Strategy Manager
Interim Planning Strategy Manager
Principal Planning Officer
Senior Community Services Officer
Democratic Services & Elections Officer

Other Member(s) in Attendance

Councillor Doina Cornell (Leader)
Councillor Nigel Studdert-Kennedy
Councillor Dave Mossman
Councillor Stephen Davies

Councillor John Jones
Councillor Gordon Craig
Councillor Lindsey Green
Councillor Chris Brine

The Chair confirmed that Councillor Trevor Hall had resigned from the committee and will be replaced by Councillor Steven Lydon. In accordance with usual practice this would be reported to the next meeting of Council for information.

The Chair indicated that this was his last meeting after nine years as Chair of the committee, and thanked all Councillors and Officers who had helped him over the last 30 years. A number of Councillors thanked Councillor Pickering for his leadership over many years, and the depth of knowledge, skills and experience he had contributed.

0046 Apologies

There were none.

0047 Declaration of Interests

There were none.

0048 Minutes

RESOLVED **That the Minutes of the meeting held on 4 February 2021 are approved as a correct record**

0049 Public Question Time

There were two public questions. The first from Dr David Thombs and the second from Mr Andy Davis, who both joined the meeting to ask their questions. Answers were delivered by the Chair. Supplementary questions were also answered. (Refer to Item 4 and the Recording of the Meeting).

0050 Tree Strategy

Dr Gareth Parry, Director for Nature's Recovery, Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust had sent apologies and the 2030 Strategy Manager delivered presentation slides on his behalf, which gave a broad overview of the Gloucestershire Tree Strategy.

The 2030 Strategy Manager then introduced the report which gave a high-level overview of why tree planting should be undertaken in order to mitigate emissions, adapt to climate change by promoting shade and soil stability, help to manage floods through reduced water run-off, and improve habitats. It was a complex consideration to ensure that the right tree was in the right place for the right reasons. The Local Nature Partnership's (LNP) Strategy was in line with the Council's 2030 Strategy principles to work in partnership with experts, to engage expertise and address the natural environment theme in a 'nature knows no boundaries' approach. The report recommended adopting the LNP's Gloucestershire Tree Strategy as an efficient and expedient way of starting action planning and delivery and illustrated how the action linked to the Council's current practice and approach. It proposed some early considerations that could frame the next steps. Five action areas of Influence, Invest, Identify, Improve and Interact were suggested as a basis for the Stroud District local action plan. It was recommended that a local action plan be developed without delay in order to continue with the Council's 2030 progress.

Councillor Kay asked how quickly the local action plan could be developed and whether it would be available for the committee at its next meeting. The 2030 Manager explained that the process was likely to take a little longer. The 2030 Strategy governance systems would be used to work with the 2030 Recovery Board to gain initial input, and would then be presented to the Environment Committee. Councillor Kay highlighted the importance of involving Parish Councils in any action plan produced and reiterated the need for the plan to be produced as soon as possible.

Councillor Rathor raised a number of questions including how local people, and especially young people, could be involved in this work; how plans could be developed so the people of Stroud had more investment in and ownership of them, and what more could be done when faced with the reality of a future catastrophe. The 2030 Strategy Manager emphasised that whilst there was a lot to be done, the Council has already achieved a great deal and had the ability to achieve more as was evident in the 2030 Strategy. A large amount of tree planting had already taken place in partnership with the Environment Agency, and a new development was planned with Salmon Springs. This development was a good example of engaging people in this work with the aim of the site becoming a training ground for community volunteers to upskill. Attention was drawn to the Youth Council's commitment in the Strategy and their keenness to engage other young people in a proactive manner. The Strategy was comprehensive, and not just a Carbon Neutral 2030 Strategy, but a climate and ecological emergency response, which went far beyond what many other Councils were pursuing.

Councillor Williams noted that there were instances in the district where land had been bought and trees felled by those who wished to use them for fuel. He questioned what the Council could do to protect these areas, including particularly sensitive areas which provided habitats for rare species. He also asked what the landowner's position would be in relation to control, ownership and maintenance of trees. The Chair explained that the Council had tree protection orders which could be used to protect trees and private woodland was controlled by the Forestry Commission. He confirmed that issues relating to ownership of trees would be dependent on the legal agreement with the landowner.

In response to a question from Councillor Hurst regarding how a balance was achieved between the loss of land for food production against the planting of trees, the Chair confirmed that the Council did not have any direct planning control over this although it was likely that most farmers would continue to grow food. Councillor Townley also raised a concern about the need to balance the planting of trees alongside encouraging more sustainable use of land for agriculture, and asked whether a more proactive approach was needed to encourage better utilisation of existing woodland. Members were informed that the 2030 Strategy considered issues relating to food and farming, including economic development, and a Food Strategy would also be developed.

Councillor Jones asked whether encouragement would be given to farmers to plant more fruit trees given the impact of climate change on some other types of tree. The 2030 Strategy Manager confirmed that this was a relevant consideration, particularly in relation to the need for local food supply chains, and planting of fruit trees was planned.

The motion was proposed by Councillor Pickering and seconded by Councillor Williams.

Councillor Kay proposed an amendment to change b) in the decision box to the following:

'b) Agree that a local action plan be developed and monitored in combination with 2030 governance processes by the end of October 2021.'

Councillor Jones seconded the amendment proposed by Councillor Kay.

- RESOLVED**
- a) To endorse the Gloucestershire Tree Strategy as the basis for Stroud District delivery of greater tree cover, and**
 - b) To agree that a local action plan be developed and monitored in combination with 2030 Strategy governance processes by the end of October 2021.**

0051 Recycling - Developments for the Future

The Community Services Manager introduced the report which outlined what improvements could be made to insulate the Council from global recycling markets. He detailed the two main problems with the current recycling system. Paper and cardboard were collected by a box containment method which produced wet recyclate, affecting quality and generating additional costs. One option was the introduction of a wheelie bin containment method for this recyclate to keep it dry. The introduction of wheelie bins would need stringent modelling, as while there would be an expectation of this option that residents would recycle more, the consequence could be increased demand on fleet personnel and vehicles. The Community Services Manager explained that each of the proposals in the report were complex and whilst some rudimentary costs were provided, each would require comprehensive modelling. He noted that an alternative option was to introduce a larger tipping bay. This would allow for the rotation of paper and cardboard on site so it would be sent for processing in a dry state. This was not possible at present as the recyclate had to be moved daily due to space constraints.

The Community Services Manager detailed the third option for Dry Mixed Recycling. At present this recycling was sorted through a material recovery facility so the aim would be for the Council to take responsibility for the sorting rather than being reliant on a third party. He explained that whilst indicative costs were set out in the report, there was a need to look at future Government policy following the current consultation, particularly in relation to the deposit return scheme and extended producer responsibility.

Councillor Lydon asked what the possibilities were of aligning the collection and disposal of waste across all districts in the county to achieve important economies of scale. The Community Services Manager indicated that county wide discussions took place through the Gloucestershire Resources and Waste Partnership. However, whilst it may be possible to standardise what can be collected, the methods of collection were difficult to align due to geographical differences and local priorities.

Councillor Hurst asked whether consideration had been given to using wet cardboard in a different way, mixing it with the composting system rather than drying it out for sale. The Community Services Manager explained that at present mixed loads of paper and cardboard were sorted by the processor so there was no way of separating cardboard.

Councillor Townley suggested that having an additional wheelie bin would be a real disadvantage for those people with limited space, and questioned whether local

collection points could be used more widely. The Community Services Manager agreed that this was an option and that any proposal to introduce a wheelie bin scheme would require consultation with residents and appraisal of wider implications.

RESOLVED a) To note the report contents;
 b) To instruct officers in consultation with the Chair, to continue exploring opportunities to work with neighbouring authorities, and
 c) To bring a further report to Committee when there is greater clarity on the Government policy, in particular on the deposit return scheme (DRS) and extended producer responsibility (EPR).

0052 Pre-Submission District Local Plan

The Chair reminded Members that the guidance from the Local Government Association was clear, that the planning process should continue during the pre-election period. Government expected all Local Planning Authorities to update Local Plans at least every five years, and since the Council adopted the current Local Plan in 2015, parts of it were now out of date. Government had urged all Local Authorities to continue with plan reviews despite the ongoing pandemic, and wished to see up-to-date Local Plans by 2023.

The Head of Planning Strategy introduced the report. The draft Local Plan was the product of four years' work including taking account of extensive public consultation. It sought to manage the development needs of the District for the next 20 years whilst delivering on the commitment for the district to become carbon neutral by 2030, adapting to the impact of climate change, and providing resilience for the future. The Local Plan's biggest contribution to the district's CN2030 commitment was to reduce the need for travel by private car and the development strategy's design took this into account. The aims of the development strategy were outlined including:

- to concentrate housing growth at the main centres of population
- to support the regeneration of the canal corridor through the Stroud valleys and at Berkeley/Sharpness
- to maximise the use of previously developed land
- to focus strategic employment at accessible locations within the Rail/A38/M5 corridor.

Whilst the strategy was based on concentrated development it included an element of dispersal to meet the needs of rural communities, by providing lesser levels of development in smaller towns and larger villages and allowing small scale development on the edge of smaller villages to support social sustainability. It prioritised the conservation and enhancement of the Cotswolds AONB, whilst supporting limited housing development to meet needs arising from within the AONB.

The Head of Planning Strategy detailed that the Council needed to comply with an increased minimum housing requirement set by government of 630 houses per year for the next 20 years. The range of housing sites within the Plan would give the Council the greatest ability to meet the challenging national requirement. The Local Plan sought to identify sufficient employment land to meet the job requirements of the local population and to reduce some of the current out-commuting. Requirements for the local economy would need to be reviewed once the longer-term impact of Covid

19 and Brexit became apparent. Sites for allocation had been rigorously assessed using the results of the Council's Strategic Assessment of Land Availability work, transport and infrastructure work and Sustainability Appraisal. Sites had been selected which performed relatively well through the assessment process and which could deliver the Local Plan development strategy. Gloucester City had identified a shortfall of c.6000 dwellings to meet future housing needs. To meet the Council's legal duty to cooperate requirements, a site at Whaddon had been safeguarded as the most appropriate site to help with addressing the shortfall, although it was expected that other neighbouring authorities would also assist.

The Head of Planning Strategy outlined the key policies and proposals which aimed to meet the strategic objectives of the Plan, and guide and manage development proposals, including those for new housing, for securing enhancements for local open space and indoor sports facilities, amended retail policies and additional support for the restoration of the canal corridors. Following approval of the Draft Local Plan, officers would finalise the content of the Plan and undertake a six-week period of public consultation commencing at the end of May. The results of the consultation, the Pre-submission Plan, and accompanying evidence would then be submitted for examination by an independent, Government-appointed Inspector by September 2021. It was hoped the Council would be able to adopt the Plan by the end of 2022, thereby meeting the requirement for all Local Authorities to have an up-to-date Local Plan by 2023.

Councillor Lydon asked what constraints the Council had in developing a Local Plan which best met the needs of Stroud, and what progress had been made on a county-wide agreement of joint working. The Head of Planning Strategy answered that there was a wealth of national legislation which set out the framework for Local Plans and which provided a range of constraints. Whilst the government set minimum housing requirements, the Council had the power to decide how to distribute that growth. A statement of common ground was being prepared between the six districts and Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) to provide a longer timeframe to work together on strategic planning matters.

Councillor Townley queried, as the Council had adopted the policy of Independent Living, whether it was appropriate to refer to sheltered housing within the Plan and the Head of Planning Strategy agreed to review this. Councillor Townley asked how the proportions of affordable housing and of accessible housing had been derived in the Plan, and asked for clarification on whether houses could be built on sites adjacent to defined settlement boundaries. The Head of Planning Strategy confirmed that the Council had worked with neighbouring authorities to carry out a Local Housing Needs Assessment (LHNA) that had rigorously looked at the evidence that justified the proportion of development that should be affordable and the proportion of homes that need to be adaptable and accessible. The results of this assessment were reflected in the Local Plan, and planning applications would be appraised to ensure the housing mix reflected the evidence in the LHNA. The current Local Plan had very rigid policies relating to settlement limits and more flexibility was now provided for smaller settlements that did not have opportunities within the settlement boundaries for additional market or affordable housing. Proposals for development outside the settlement limits had to be included in a neighbourhood development plan or supported by the relevant parish council to ensure that genuine local support exists.

Councillor Jones asked a range of questions of clarification relating to:

- the policy which related to building adjacent to the settlement boundary
- the reinstatement of the railway at Sharpness
- how the proposed development at Sharpness links with South Gloucestershire development work
- biodiversity issues associated with the PS37 Wisloe site
- access from the PS37 site to Cam and Dursley railway station
- agricultural land classification

The Head of Planning Strategy explained that the new policy supporting sustainable rural communities referred specifically to 'adjoining settlement limits' whilst the affordable housing policy on rural exception sites, which had been made more flexible, referred to 'close to' settlement development limits. A bid has been submitted to the Department for Transport for reinstating the railway line at Sharpness and, if successful, would allow for the development of a strong business case for the reinstatement. The plan was for a development of 2,400 homes at Sharpness by 2040, based on the local impact assessments, and if the site was allocated it would be revisited in the next review of the Local Plan to ensure any increase above 2,400 could be accommodated. A significant amount of traffic modelling had been completed with Highways England, GCC and South Gloucestershire Council to ensure the Sharpness and other developments would not have an adverse impact on the M5 Junction 14 which would require enhancement. Impacts on biodiversity had been assessed at Wisloe through the Sustainability Appraisal and no significant issues had been identified. Natural England were satisfied that everything could be mitigated adequately, although more detailed ecological work would be required prior to examination. The Head of Planning Strategy emphasised that whilst there was a dispute between the site promoters of PS37 and a local action group relating to the 1983 Agricultural Land Classification, the quality of agricultural land did not override other planning issues, and all factors had to be balanced whilst looking at the overall impact on the area. Whilst it was a constraint, all constraints had to be reviewed collectively and Natural England had clarified this in correspondence, which included a range of mitigation measures for the site. The Head of Planning Strategy expressed agreement that direct access from the Wisloe site to the railway station was fundamental to maximising the sustainable opportunities of the site, and confirmed that income from developers and other funding streams would be used to enhance sustainable forms of access.

Councillor Hurst suggested that it would be helpful to provide a definition of 'sustainability' in relation to its use in the Local Plan and asked for clarification on what means there were within the Plan to dictate to developers how houses would be constructed, and how the requirements for heating systems within the Plan would be enforced. The Head of Planning Strategy explained that 'sustainability' and 'sustainable development' are defined in the National Planning Policy Framework and national guidance. In the Local Plan it was defined as 'development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. The Local Plan aimed to balance the social, environmental and economic objectives of sustainability through a series of policies supporting social need, economic need and environmental limits. Requirements for construction of houses were defined in a number of policies including ES1, which related to sustainable construction and required developments to include a higher standard of

construction beyond building regulations, including delivery of net zero carbon emissions. It was confirmed that these policy requirements and the heating supply requirements set out in DES3 would have to be discussed with the Inspector as they were in advance of what was required under current building regulations and national policy.

In accordance with the Council's Constitution (Section 3: Paragraph 6) a vote was taken for the meeting to continue past 10.00pm. This was agreed unanimously and the meeting continued.

Councillor Tomblin asked how the number of houses on the PS24 site had been increased from 700 to 900. The Head of Planning Strategy confirmed that additional parcels of land had been added to the site since 2019, and 700 houses would have led to a very low density which would not have met the national policy requirements for efficient use of land. In addition, 900 houses ensured that resources including a new primary school would be provided, to ensure the development was viable and delivering required infrastructure. Councillor Tomblin asked why Cam was referred to as a town in the Plan when it is a village and the Head of Planning Strategy agreed to amend this.

Councillor Craig raised safety and adverse publicity issues relating to the storage of ammonium nitrate in Sharpness Docks. The Head of Planning Strategy confirmed that planning decisions were based on evidence. The government set and monitored safety criteria through its standards, and the Health and Safety Executive controlled, monitored and inspected the storage of ammonium nitrate in Sharpness Docks. There was no evidence that standards of safety and regulation had been contravened and the new settlement did not breach the outer consultation zone apart from a small area on the shoreline which was not proposed for development.

The Chair moved the Motion which was seconded by Councillor Lydon.

Councillor Haydn Jones proposed an amendment for the following underlined additions to the decision box:

- a) The draft Local Plan (appendix A) is amended to remove site PS37 (Wisloe) and request Officers issue additional late papers before Full Council to include appropriate replacement site policy wording. The plan should then be approved for publication in accordance with Regulations 19 and 20 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 and subsequently to be submitted to the Secretary of State in accordance with Regulation 22 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012;
- b) The public consultation reports (appendices B and C) are approved for publication, and
- c) The Head of Planning Strategy is delegated authority to make consequential changes to accommodate removal of PS37 and minor map, textual and formatting changes to the draft document before publication.

This amendment was seconded by Councillor Hurst and then debated. On being put to the vote, with five votes for and six votes against, the amendment fell and was not carried.

The substantive Motion was then debated further. Councillor Rathor had left the meeting and was not part of voting relating to this Motion. On being put to the vote, it was carried with 6 votes for and 5 votes against.

**RECOMMENDED
TO COUNCIL**

- a) The draft Local Plan (appendix A) is approved for publication in accordance with Regulations 19 and 20 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 and subsequently to be submitted to the Secretary of State in accordance with Regulation 22 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012;**
- b) The public consultation reports (appendices B and C) are approved for publication, and**
- c) The Head of Planning Strategy is delegated authority to make minor map, textual and formatting changes to the draft document before publication.**

0053 Member Reports

- a) Planning Review Panel
The report had been circulated. Councillor Studdert-Kennedy indicated that despite considering the new Local Plan in great detail, it was not possible for the Panel to achieve unanimous support for it. He conveyed thanks to all past and present Members of PRP and all Officers involved for their work on the new Local Plan over many years.
- b) Stroud Regeneration Committee
The report had been circulated to Committee Members. There were no questions.
- c) Performance Monitoring
The report had been circulated to Committee Members. There were no questions.

0054 Member Questions

There were none.

The meeting closed at 10.54 pm

Chair