



STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Question from Cllr Nicholas Housden to Chair of Housing Committee

Chair in 2002 a government planning inspector judged the Ship Inn site in Stonehouse unsuitable for Social Housing. In 2018 a planning application for this site was withdrawn following a lack of support (before it could be rejected!) Does this council have a plan for the Ship Inn site currently sitting in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) If so, when does the Council expect to share this plan with members for consideration

Reply

The planning application made by the County Council in 2002 was an outline application for residential development, it was not for social housing.

This council's planning application was for full planning permission for a 100% affordable housing scheme and the Planning Officer's report to committee in November 2018 recommended planning permission be granted, the full reasons and balance of planning considerations are set out in the report but key to note is that in those intervening 16 years, planning legislation and government guidance had moved on and there has been more residential development along this stretch of the canal. In August 2018, the Government published a green paper on social housing, emphasising the need for additional delivery, with Councils expected to play key roles within the forthcoming years to combat the severe shortage of such housing within the nation as a whole. This is captured in the officer's report: *'There are also other material considerations that could be deemed to outweigh the previous objection. One such consideration is that all residential units will be built as affordable housing units, something that is greatly welcomed given the district wide affordable housing shortage'*.

The former Ship Inn site has been included in the new build programme and Housing Revenue Account budget since March 2016 as an alternative to the original development site at Wharfdale Way. Part of that site, valued at £200k at the time, has been protected as a public open space with wildflower planting, seating, parking and access onto the canal towpath, transformed in partnership with Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, Stonehouse Town Council and Stroud Valleys Project. The play area just along the towpath has also been planted and improved and the adjacent garages demolished to provide more general parking by the canal. These sites have been offered to the Town Council to retain for the community and that offer remains open. They will also provide moorings for the canal once Phase1b of the Cotswold Canals Connected project is linked to the national waterway network at Saul.

The request that the former Ship Inn site be considered for community use was noted in a report to Housing Committee in June 2019, in which it was stated that 'further updates will be brought to committee, but the budget will remain in the Medium Term Financial Plan for this scheme until a final decision is made'. The report also stated that 'these sites along with the cycle path, woodland and boat house owned by Wycliffe adjacent to the former Ship Inn site, all present a considerable and exciting opportunity to link Stonehouse to the canal and the canal to Stonehouse, with boat moorings along this stretch of the canal'.

The Housing Committee, on December 8th 2020, agreed to recommend to Council that a budget continue to be included in the Capital Programme for provision of New Build Housing on the former Ship Inn site. This recommendation was considered at Full Council in February 2021 and the budget allocation approved.

The Committee's decision that this site remains part of its new build programme has only recently reconfirmed and endorsed by Full Council, however the design of the scheme and its importance as part of a wider area along this stretch of the canal and links to the Town centre is recognised.

No final plans for this stretch of canal have been agreed and the Council continues to explore the benefits of opening up a wide range of strategic possibilities, with a variety of positive outcomes along this stretch of the canal, including the former Ship Inn site. This includes housing as well as consideration of other community benefits, maximising the opportunities arising from the recent successful Heritage Lottery Fund bid for Phase 1b.

The Council has consulted and engaged with key stakeholders (including Stonehouse Town Council) and this will continue into wider public consultation through the autumn as it develops the Canal Strategy and explores the provision of community hubs along the whole stretch of the canal as an important part of realising the full benefits of the reinstated canal. It is expected that a further report on the future proposals for the site and wider area will be brought back to the committee in the Spring.