

The Planning Strategy Team

Development Services,

Stroud District Council,

Ebley Mill,

Stroud,

Gloucestershire

GL5 4UB.

28th November, 2017

Dear Team Members,

Re: Stroud District Local Plan Review - Issues and Options Oct.2017.

Woodchester Parish Council welcomes this opportunity to comment on this review which identifies the housing, employment, retail and community development issues in Stroud district which are required to meet local planning needs until 2031.

Our observations refer not only to issues which affect Stroud District as a whole but more specifically, to those of particular concern to the residents of the Parish of Woodchester. The page numbers and paragraph headings quoted are those used in the consultation document. Where we do not refer to specific options raised in the review, this is not because we regard them as of lesser importance to the key issues affecting the whole of Stroud district but they reflect the needs and priorities of our local Woodchester residents represented by the Parish Council.

Taking the key issues as spelt out in the document, we consider these in the order of greatest importance as:

- I. Affordable Housing.
- II. The Environment.
- III. The Economy.
- IV. Health and Wellbeing.
- V. Delivery.

1. AFFORDABLE HOUSING.

(a). District Wide

We accept the need for more affordable housing throughout the District particularly for young families and the elderly with priority given to local residents in need or in those wishing to return to the District for employment or family reasons (Para 9). Further such housing should be located in the right place supported by the availability of local services and the necessary infrastructure to maintain a sustainable environment. Preferably this should mean building on brown as opposed to green field or green belt sites (Para 17). In this connection we note and support HM Government's

commitment in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's most recent budget to building more (affordable) houses particularly for first time buyers and for the continuance of subsidies towards the initial cost of mortgages.

(b). In Woodchester.

Our housing needs survey in 2015 identified at least 12 families in need of affordable housing in the Parish. The majority of social housing provided in Woodchester is for the elderly. However a site for three council houses on land owned by SDC on Southbank was cleared three years ago but remains undeveloped-hardly a good example of the Council meeting local housing need!

Of the two major housing developments planned in North Woodchester-Rooksmoor Mills and the Old Piano Factory- neither has affordable housing included in their plans on the grounds that their provision would not be economically viable to the developers because of the cost of clearing the existing brown field sites. We would argue that this provides an opportunity for SDC to link the granting of planning permission more specifically to the provision of affordable housing and/or to enter into partnership with the developers to provide such housing in relation to local need on a larger scale than hitherto.

2. THE ENVIRONMENT.

(a). District Wide.

We accept the need for better transport with the emphasis on reducing Carbon Dioxide emissions by limiting car use, extending facilities for cycling and making improvements in public transport. In reality this will involve the Council increasing subsidies to private bus companies or else accepting that fares will increase to the extent that the car may prove the cheaper option than the bus or train.

Protecting and enhancing the historic environment whilst adapting to modern demands means ensuring that the Council not only maintains existing parks and leisure facilities but also has a particular duty to ensure that any new development pays due regard to heritage aspects and takes into account neighbourhood and parish/village design statements. This is sometimes honoured more in the breach than the observance.

(b). In Woodchester.

We have had particular concerns that at least one of the two major planned developments (At Rooksmoor Mills) required a High Court Injunction following SDC DCC's failure to consider the heritage aspects of the scheme when they originally granted planning permission. A revised plan has now been accepted but the heritage aspects of building in the area still remain an issue for local residents. In addition we would strongly argue that the two sites identified as suitable for housing in North Woodchester through SALA (as shown on Page 40 of the document) viz: NWO A, West of Lawns Park and NWO B, in Rooksmoor (immediately opposite the Mill development described above) should not be accepted for development on heritage grounds. The Lawns Park Site is adjacent to the Cotswolds AONB, has multiple owners and is subject to a restrictive building covenant. Both this site and that at Rooksmoor, which latter is in the Industrial Conservation Area

and with many listed buildings, are described in the document as being having significant heritage restraints (Medium/High sensitivity in their impact on the environment).

We accept Stroud's need to meet increased housing demand across the whole District in the next fifteen years and, while we can see advantages in concentrating major developments on one site rather than scattered across the whole district on sustainable grounds, our local experience suggests that developers will try to push the boundaries and game the planning system by ignoring or paying lip service to the historic and heritage aspects of a site they are keen to build on while arguing at the same time that their schemes meet sustainability criteria. SDC should see it as their duty to strictly enforce heritage conditions both now and in the future before granting planning permission, particularly for larger out of scale developments unsympathetic to the local environment and architectural traditions .

3. EMPLOYMENT

(a). District Wide.

Stroud District is a bellwether of the economy nationally. When the economy is doing poorly so does Stroud. When it improves Stroud does too, but, all too often, after a considerable delay. One of the strengths of our local economy is knowledge based industries (Redler comes to mind) and small scale engineering, manufacturing and creative industries (Ecotricity for instance). There's a skilled workforce in Stroud and the Council's plans to provide for a vibrant and sustainable local economy based on attracting businesses to the area by encouraging the availability of suitable sites for development and offering favourable rates to encourage new businesses is strongly supported. We are hampered because of the nature of the Five Valleys by poor quality of broadband connection but this requires government and private companies to provide and is largely outside the remit of the Council. Of course the location is a desirable one adjacent to or in an AONB and therefore attractive to tourists and second home owners. This makes it more difficult for incomers who want to work here but can't afford the housing costs. Hence the need for more affordable housing as spelt out in Para 1.

(b) In Woodchester.

Our Parish Plan spells out the need to attract and keep small- scale businesses here in conjunction with residential accommodation (Working from home). This has always been a feature of life in Woodchester which has a high proportion of self-employed residents. Some of the newer housing developments originally proposed included a proportion of new housing associated with work places. One might describe this as the ultimate in sustainability. This seems to have fallen by the wayside in the name of pure housing demand and quick profits and we would like to see more of these joint developments encouraged by a favourable Council Tax regime for mixed residential/business development.

4. . HEALTH & WELLBEING.

(a). District Wide.

We applaud the intention to increase the health and wellbeing of Stroud residents by providing better opportunities for health and recreation. Cycle tracks and the like have proved popular locally

—especially with young people but the reality is we suffer in the village from a shortage of space for younger ones to enjoy themselves with families and friends. While we have many footpaths locally for those who are physically active and enjoy outdoor exercise, leisure facilities for the less mobile and particularly the elderly are in short supply. The ongoing improvements to the Stroud Leisure Centre provide an excellent model to follow.

Many retirees have moved into the area and place an increasing demand on acute medical, and social and public health services. Independent or supported living means a greater need for willing, well trained, well paid and motivated staff who know the area and the clientele and can afford to live locally. This adds weight to the requirement re affordable housing. (Para 1) to attract and keep these essential staff in the District

(b) In Woodchester.

GP services in the area are excellent but under strain from increased demand as elsewhere in the NHS .We have a relatively well to do local population but with pockets of individual deprivation. Many elderly or disabled persons benefit from visits by Neighbourhood Wardens and advisers who can put them in touch with the relevant Social and other voluntary services .We would like to see the local authority expand these services. It may be that local residents would accept an increase in their precept or Council Tax if they could be sure that such services were always made available whenever needed.

5. DELIVERY.

(a)District Wide.

We feel that it has been clearly demonstrated that Stroud District Council cannot work alone to implement many of the issues mentioned in the previous sections. We should continue to co-operate with our neighbouring authorities to meet the housing, economic and infra structure needs of local residents particularly through enhanced local employment and more affordable housing, The Cotswolds Canal Project is a good example of the sort of interagency and authority working likely to achieve positive results.

(b) In Woodchester.

Like all local parish councils we have a limited budget in the form of our local precept which permit us to implement no more than the most essential of local services to residents. Without voluntary support and fund raising from sponsors and advice and support from agencies such as the Gloucestershire Association of Town and Parish Councils, we would be even less able to meet local residents' needs. We understand that the District and indeed the County Council are under increasing pressure from cuts in central government funding and the need to make savings, but we remain concerned that we are being expected as unpaid volunteer councillors to undertake much of the work formerly, currently, or in the future statutorily undertaken by the District Council without the resources and support to do so.

6 . OUR TOWNS & VILLAGES

Woodchester Parish Council falls within the classification of the hierarchy of settlements laid down in the Stroud District Local Plan as a 'Third Tier or Accessible Settlement with limited facilities and development limits for both housing and industry.' We agree with this classification and believe that that Stroud District Council should continue to maintain this form of classification (Option1 –Page 30) throughout the District amended as necessary to reflect the views of local residents in their neighbourhood and parish plans and design statements. As we have made clear previously (See section 2) this presupposes due weight being given to the historic and heritage aspects of any new housing or business development proposed in the area.

We trust you will find these comments helpful and constructive and look forward to receiving the Preferred Options Consultation in a year's time.

Yours Sincerely,

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