

## STROUD TOWN COUNCIL

### **Minutes of the meeting of COUNCIL 1st March 2021 at 7.30pm Online meeting via Zoom**

#### **Present**

Cllrs Geoffrey Andrews (from item 6), Simon Arundel, John Bloxsom (from item 2), Kevin Cranston (Chair), Laurie Davies (to item 9), Susan Fenton, Rob Green (from item 2), Camilla Hale, John Marjoram, Jess McQuail, Stella Parkes, Alan Sage, Lucas Schoemaker (from item 6), Haydn Sutton and Chas Townley (from item 6 to item 9).

#### **In attendance**

Helen Bojaniwska (Town Clerk), Kate Montgomery (Deputy Clerk) Marianne Sweet (Communications Officer), and Stroud District Councillor Simon Pickering

#### **Absent**

Cllr Vanessa Price

#### **1. Apologies**

Apologies were received from Cllr Steven Naumann (personal) and from Gloucestershire County Councillor Eva Ward.

#### **2. Declarations of Interest or Requests for dispensations**

No interests were declared. There were no requests for dispensations.

#### **3. Minutes of meeting of 11<sup>th</sup> January 2021**

The minutes of the council meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2021 were **approved** by the members present and will be signed as a correct record by the Chair at the next possible opportunity.

#### **4. Mayor's remarks**

The Mayor had not attended any events.

#### **5. Questions from members of the public**

No questions were received.

#### **6. Verbal reports from District and County Councillors**

District Cllr Sutton reported that Stroud District Council and Stroud Town Council were working in parallel on climate emergency action.

Cllrs Andrews and Schoemaker joined the meeting.

District Cllr Pickering report that the District Council had approved their budget and renewed their contract with UBICO for waste collection and grounds maintenance. He noted that the capital budget included funding for cycling infrastructure.

Cllr Townley joined the meeting.

District Cllr Townley reported that the District Council budget included funding for retrofitting housing stock. He expressed concern about delays in dealing with "void" properties. Cllr

Townley raised a concern about begging in the town centre. The Deputy Clerk reported that the Stroud District Community Safety Partnership were about to start a project to address this issue.

It was noted that the District Council's 2030 Strategy was due to be approved at their full Council meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2021 and that several new posts relating to delivery of the strategy had been created.

## **7. Clerk's Report**

The Town Clerk's report was noted.

## **8. Stroud District Council's Leisure and Wellbeing review**

No representative from Stroud District Council attended. Cllrs Cranston, McQuail and Hale had however taken part in a District Council focus group on 26<sup>th</sup> February, so were invited to provide a report on the issues discussed concerning Stratford Park, the Leisure Centre and sports facilities, and the Museum in the Park.

The discussion had focused on the barriers to participation, including access to Stratford Park. The potential for a pedestrian/cycle route from Merrywalks to the Park as set out in the Shaping the Heart of Stroud Neighbourhood Development Plan had been explained. Cllrs had stressed the need to encourage and enable greater participation, addressing concerns about cost and flexibility, and the role of the site in COVID-19 recovery.

It was noted that the café at the leisure centre had closed and that the provider's contract was up for renewal. Cllrs had stressed to Stroud District Council the importance of Stratford Park to the town and urged them to continue to engage with the Town Council and the Cowle Trust, owners of the museum collection.

In general discussion members focussed on: the potential for the café at the leisure centre to be an attraction in its own right, issues about walking and cycling access; the need for a safe crossing between Stratford Park and Stratford Court; the lack of changing facilities at Stratford Court; and concerns about road safety and pollution on approaches to the site.

Members were urged to complete Stroud District Council's online survey.

**Action:** Clerk – report to Stroud District Council's Leisure and Wellbeing review.

## **9. Potential closure of Severn View School**

Cllr Davies presented a report on the closure of the school, which had been announced by Academies Enterprise Trust (AET) in response to falling pupil numbers. Cllr Davies had been supporting families with a campaign to keep the school open. It was reported that the official procedures regarding closure had not been completed yet, but families were feeling pressured to take places at other schools for fear of missing out on limited local spaces. The decision to close had been presented to them as a fait accompli, rather than something requiring consultation.

A lack of investment in the school, frequent staff changes and the loss of the Children's Centre and nursery were all thought to have impacted on pupil numbers. Families were reported to be struggling to find places for their children locally.

It was noted that schools converted to academies are not able to revert to local authority control, but there might be potential for a partnership with another school or for another Academy Trust to take over.

The Clerk reported on ownership of the site and restrictions on use of the Children's Centre and recommended applying for the site to be listed as an Asset of Community Value. Cllrs were worried about the impact on local families, particularly relating to commuting within and beyond the town to access alternative schools. Concern was also raised about the availability of spaces to accommodate siblings within the same school. It was noted that when AET took over the community were excluded from the governance of the school.

There was significant concern that the site might be sold for development which would impact on the future of community use of the site, particularly the Children's Centre, which had become home to the Top of Town Tots.

The process required for closing an academy and the strategic role of Gloucestershire County Council in planning for the provision of school spaces and as owners of the site were discussed.

It was **agreed** to support a campaign to keep Severn View School open and to authorise use of the Ward Projects budget for associated costs.

#### **Actions:**

Clerk: apply to list the whole site, including the former Children's Centre as an asset of community value; issue a public statement in support of the parents' campaign; arrange a meeting with Siobhan Baillie MP; contact the Regional Commissioner for Schools; contact Gloucestershire County Council.

Cllrs Townley and Davies left the meeting.

#### **10. Contract for the installation of new play equipment at The Leazes**

Four tenders had been received and additional information sought for clarification. The Clerk clarified that this project forms part of an agreed programme of replacement and refurbishment of play equipment across all the Council's play areas. Part of the cost would be met from a s.106 developer's contribution.

The Clerk was asked to include the potential lifespan of play equipment in future tender specifications.

As there was no clear winner it was agreed to conduct a simple community consultation to allow users of the site to express a preference between the top two proposals and delegate the final decision to the Clerk based on the outcome of the consultation.

**Action:** Clerk arrange consultation and approve contract

#### **11. Contract for project management**

It was **agreed** to award a contract for managing building projects to Bailey Partnership.

**12. Contract for delivery of a community engagement project concerning street spaces in Stroud**

It was **agreed** to award a contract for delivery of a community engagement project concerning street spaces in Stroud to Streets Reimagined Limited at a cost of £12,000 plus VAT.

**Action:** Clerk issue contract

**13. Addition to list of charge card users**

It was **agreed** to add the Council’s Community Development Officer to the list of charge card users subject to a spend limit of £1,000 and a transaction value limit of £500.

**Action:** Clerk submit card application

**14. Committee reports**

The following reports, previously circulated, were received.

- Consultations & Highways: 4<sup>th</sup> January and 8<sup>th</sup> February 2021
- Finance and Policy: 18<sup>th</sup> January 2021
- Environment: 26<sup>th</sup> January 2021
- Regeneration: 11<sup>th</sup> February 2021

The meeting ended at 21.30pm.

Chair.....

Date.....