

Stroud Town Centre Neighbourhood Development Plan

Shaping the heart of Stroud

Report of culture, leisure and heritage seminar held on 24th February 2015 at The Subscription Rooms, Stroud

Present

Professor Hugh Barton,	Shaping the Heart of Stroud Steering Group	Chair
Ruth Davey	Look Again	
Ian Mackintosh	Stroudwater Textiles Trust	
Ian McRiner		
Stella Parkes	Stroud Valleys Project	
Rachel Russell	Stroud Preservation Trust	Note taker
Juliet Shipman	Stroud Civic Society	
David Stuart	English Heritage	
Kevin Ward	Museum in the Park	

Purpose

To identify options for the Neighbourhood Development Plan on issues related to culture, leisure and heritage.

Process

Facilitated discussion

Ruth Davey facilitated a discussion on current cultural life in Stroud and how it could be improved. Ruth has worked on several inner city regeneration projects, mainly in Bristol and currently works for local charity, All Sorts and runs her own consultancy business.

Impressions of Stroud's cultural life from attendees included:

Creative industries, musical events, community choirs, markets, festivals (Fringe, SIT, SVA, Walking, Nature) limestone buildings, Brunel Goods Shed, art exhibitions, historic inhabitants with innovative ideas, a bohemian and "green" place with a split personality, both visually and socially.

Key points from an initial discussion on issues the Neighbourhood Plan might address:

- **Gateway areas:** Wallbridge, Merrywalks A 46 roundabout, top of High Street, pedestrian route along London Road. Should be more attractive, road and other signage should be better and point visitors towards attractions (e.g. Museum in the Park) more clearly.
- **Signage and maps:** Generally these should be better at points of entry into the town centre and within the centre to guide visitors around the town. Road signage could be improved; much of it designed to ensure traffic bypasses town. Ruth showed some maps from Bristol which gave information on a wide range of facilities and attractions related to sport, entertainment, refreshment, parks, pubs etc.
- **Tourism and marketing:** Lack of budget for marketing Stroud as a tourist destination was noted. Tends to be marketed inaccurately as a "Cotswold Town" although it is unlike others in that category.
- **Building on improvements of the last four decades:** Stroud's physical and economic condition has improved, there are less houses in multiple occupation and the High Street is largely pedestrianised. There is success to be built on.

Discussion

Hugh Barton asked attendees to consider what they would like to see in the Neighbourhood Plan. The following key points were made:

Priorities

- Policies in the Neighbourhood Development Plan should be underpinned by a good understanding of a place, its purpose and what will make it successful.
- The history and character of the town as it has grown should be valued. There are few individual outstanding buildings in the centre but together the buildings contribute to a special and attractive small town character.
- Design Quality. Policies needed but in what form? Could be broad principles or relate to specific sites. Small local competitions regarding ideas for sites could be useful.
- The views out from the town centre to the surrounding landscape should be valued and protected.
- Open spaces with seating in the town centre should be identified and preserved e.g. St Ismir corner, top of High Street, rear of Medieval Hall, St Fawkes' Place. Other open spaces, e.g. Bank Gardens should be enhanced and used more effectively.
- Halls, rooms and other venues should be identified and preserved with information on capacity and cost available at a central point.
- Most of the Town Centre Neighbourhood Development Plan area is covered by a Conservation Area. Although a Conservation Area Appraisal with management proposals exists and is available on Stroud District Council's website it has never been formally adopted. Relevant information from this document could be used when drafting the Neighbourhood Development Plan and conservation area management proposals adopted.
- A local list of heritage assets could be established. Civic Society are working on a list of 50 of the most important buildings in and around Stroud which may be relevant to work on a local list.
- Routes connecting different parts of the town need to be improved or established e.g. a better route between Goods Shed and town centre.
- The Subscription Rooms is subject of an on going review by Stroud District Council. Forecourt is also owned by SDC. Agreed that it is a significant building, critical to Stroud Town Centre's identity. It was built by public subscription, attracts people from a wide area and the forecourt provides an important public space for events, demonstrations etc. The Sub Rooms site should be covered by Neighbourhood Development Plan policies.

Point of information:

The owners of the School of Science and Art on Lansdown are the Stroud and Rodborough Educational Trust who have just let the building to a new tenant on a 3 year lease. The Cowle Trust who own Stroud Museum's Collections own 2 rooms in perpetuity and lease 3 further rooms. In the future, Museums collection stores likely to be on one site.

Next steps

The information gathered will inform the preparation of the draft plan with options for consideration at a major public consultation event between 7th and 14th March 2015.

24th February 2015