

Recover, Reset and Renew: A Strategy for Stroud District 2020 – 2021

Introduction

We are now living through a global crisis that affects us in ways most of us have never experienced before, in our personal and our working lives. How we come out of it is not yet clear to any of us. We do not yet have the answers, but we can begin to share and debate what the challenges are, and what solutions might look like.

This spring, in the lead up to all-out elections in May, at Stroud District Council we had intended to begin a conversation, within the council, and externally with the wider community, about what SDC's plan would be for the district for the next five years. The intention was to use this work to inform the incoming political administration after the elections, so the council could be ready to adopt a new plan in the autumn of 2020. We wanted to understand what data tells us about our district, what existing projects and priorities needed to be maintained, and what were the local, national and international challenges that might need new ways of thinking. The coronavirus crisis has led to a dramatic change in much of the council business and ways of working to cope with the pandemic, and the postponement of elections until 2021. And yet, the need to have a plan remains as well as being able to respond to new challenges created by the crisis.

The rapid changes in council services and way of working have demonstrated that the council has the ability to change to new threats. The lesson learnt should not be lost in working to ensure the council and whole district recovery in a way to become more resilient to future changes.

The purpose of this strategy is to set a framework for a cross-party, community and business response, to come together to think through recovery, reset our approach for new post Covid-19 circumstances and lay the foundations for longer term renewal across our district.

Stroud District is a very diverse district when it comes our politics, socio-economic backgrounds and values, and where we live, in market towns with strong and proud identities, and tiny rural communities.

Therefore, for recovery and renewal to work, it needs to feel owned by as many people as possible, and not seen as the sole preserve of any interest group, service or organisation. Our country has come through some years where it felt very divided, and yet when today's crisis sprang on us so quickly, we saw a local outpouring of mutual support and cooperation, a coming together of communities and a reminder that what we all value is sometimes greater than what divides us. One thing we have always shared - a profound affection for the places where we live.

Set out below are some core values that will underpin this call for action, and inform it at all stages and from top to bottom. This is the beginning of a conversation. If you live or work, or have any other connection to our district and our communities, you are a part of this, and you are welcome to join in.

Our Approach

Our approach to recovery and renewal will be guided by the following principles:

<p>Inclusive</p> 	<p>This process will be inclusive of all parts of our community, regardless of political beliefs, background, or which part of the district you live or work in. We will draw on the SDC's culture of cross party working, which was strengthened through this crisis with all four party political leaders working together from the beginning.</p>	<p>Collaborative</p> 	<p>This crisis has been most effectively met by collaboration and coordination. There is a role for all levels of local government, for all parts of the public and private sectors, for organisations large and small., and for individuals of all sorts of skills, expertise, and motivation. Close partnership and collaboration at local, regional and national levels will be essential.</p>
<p>Place-based</p> 	<p>We care profoundly about the places where we live and work. We can learn from good practice elsewhere, but our recovery plan has to be unique and responsive to where we live. 'Place' is just as much about the natural world on which we depend, as our built environment.</p>	<p>People-based</p> 	<p>People will be at the heart of it. This crisis has taken a great personal toll on individuals and families, and recovery cannot just be about buildings and businesses. We must understand how our mental and physical wellbeing has been affected by this crisis and learn how to make it better.</p>
<p>Scaleable and adaptable</p> 	<p>Conversations, desired outcomes, and actions to get there can be done at a district-wide level, but should also be able to be scaled down to a town, a community, or a local organisation. If a town wishes to self-organise its recovery the district and county-wide process should be a useful tool to complement that work.</p>	<p>Challenging, but respectful</p> 	<p>Our district is diverse, we will not always agree, but we can listen to different points of view with respect. We will accept challenge and critiques that are constructive, and be ready to admit if we haven't got things quite right. We will be respectful above all that this is a crisis where some have lost their friends and loved ones, and take care how we express our personal views.</p>
<p>Realistic and effective</p>	<p>It is likely we will still face months of restrictions of one sort or another, and we will face very many challenges of an order not experienced for many years, so we must manage our expectations. One district council will not have the</p>	<p>Brave and innovative</p>	<p>We must be bold, brave and ambitious. If we can create together a supportive and inclusive network that holds to all the values above, we will be ready to make innovations and take risks. Some of the challenges which our communities are</p>

	<p>resources and capacity to fix everything. But together we can work out where we can make a difference and focus there. We will set clear and realistic ambitions for recovery and renewal, seeking to deliver these both efficiently and effectively.</p>		<p>now going to face may be so difficult, we will need a new way of thinking and working. Not innovation for its own sake: let us hold to what is good, and what we value about the old ways of doing things.</p>
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Our External Recovery Work Streams

We have identified four key external and community focussed work streams. However, as we shape our recovery it may become necessary to adapt, merge or split these work streams. Each work stream will need to be flexible and responsive to short term requirements – such as the safe re-opening of high streets and public spaces – as well as more strategic activities associated with longer term recovery and renewal. Flexibility to dynamic and unforeseeable circumstances and events will also be vital as the recovery from Covid-19 is not likely to be predictable.

One Council

One of the conclusions of Stroud District Council’s recent Corporate Challenge was to improve its strategic leadership, and part of this will be to move out of a silo way of working. This recovery strategy recognises the ongoing importance of this. Wherever possible recovery, renewal and particularly building resilience, should be mainstreamed as core council responsibilities. As such, governance to drive recovery should complement existing council governance structures.

These work streams are not seen as mutually exclusive, and will be underpinned by the key drivers of Carbon Neutrality by 2030, Community Wealth Building to build Resilience, key principles adopted by Stroud District Council in 2018.

Work streams will be complementary to the existing service committees, and will not replace the ongoing work these committees have been undertaking, while recognising the impact of the current crisis on this work. Some of the key actions of the 2019-2020 Corporate Delivery Plan could not be completed because of the crisis.

The four work streams are as follows:

1. Economy, Market Towns and Rural Vitality

We know that economic activity has dramatically slowed due to the crisis, and early data compiled by the GFirst LEP indicates that Gloucestershire will face a significant economic downturn in the coming months, with Stroud District predicted to be one of those areas hardest hit. Our district has one of the largest numbers of small and medium sized businesses in the county, which perhaps lacking cash and capital reserves of large companies may face greater threat of failure. However small and medium sized businesses also often have the great potential to adapt and change to new circumstances and opportunities.

The scale of the challenge will be beyond the capability of one district council, but we have to understand what our role is, and how we can create local partnerships, and interventions, that can make a difference most effectively. Close partnership with local businesses and organisations as well as strategic partners such as the Local Enterprise Partnership and Gloucestershire County Council will be essential. It is critical that our district's economy remains resilient and starts to make a rapid transition to the low carbon economy of the future and our emerging Local Plan will provide an important way to facilitate this.

The crisis has thrown into sharp relief the inequalities in our society, and work on recovery and renewal needs to ensure priority is given to supporting those most adversely affected by the crisis. We need to understand how work may change as a result of the crisis, and how to support that, if more people now work from home. We need to support creation of local decent jobs and assistance for our home-grown businesses, large and small. Some local businesses will bounce back quickly, but others may struggle: working closely with our Local Enterprise Partnership will be essential, as they have been tasked by central government with leading on the county-wide economic recovery plan.

In 2018 SDC adopted the principles of 'Community Wealth Building', to maximise the value of local assets and enable the benefits of economic development to be retained locally as local 'anchor institutions' from the public, community and voluntary sectors, spend local on goods and services and wealth created by a community stay in the area in which it was earned. The importance of Community Wealth Building is even greater now than ever.

For years now the life of our market towns has felt fragile, as shopping habits change and banks and post offices close. Finding a way to respond to today's challenges will be difficult, but the crisis has seen a groundswell of innovation and energy in our market towns and communities in creating locally led approaches to economic recovery and revival. Encouraging and harnessing that energy will be a hallmark of our approach. Stroud District has a long tradition of innovation in industry and a fierce commitment to local solutions to big challenges: we have the potential to lead the way.

Our district is also a deeply rural place of tiny hamlets and farms. We need to recognise the specific rural challenges many people face, and make sure that access to services and housing is fair wherever you live.

We need to recognise and celebrate the diverse character of the different places across our district, identifying challenges and seizing opportunities with others to promote a thriving and sustainable future – physical, social, cultural, environmental and economic. A key starting point for further engagement and planning for recovery will be the distinctive locally based ‘visions’ already developed in the draft local plan.

2. Community Resilience and Wellbeing

The crisis has struck our communities hard, and at the same time has seen a powerful outpouring of community support. As we begin steps towards recovery, we must hold onto that positive outcome as we ask the question, how can we facilitate more resilient, self-reliant, safe and thriving communities?

We don't yet know when this crisis will end or what personal toll this crisis will take on us but we know it will be profound. Some have lost loved ones to the virus, or seen their livelihoods abruptly come to an end. People who have led active lives have found themselves defined as ‘vulnerable’ and have had to shield themselves at home. Our key workers have continued to work, caring for others or carrying out essential services, knowing they are putting themselves and their households at risk. All of us have been parted from friends and family for weeks, and a phone or Zoom call will never be the same as meeting them in real life. We all need to navigate our way through this, but we especially need to identify those who are most vulnerable and focus support and services for them. A study published just before the crisis showed how in the last ten years, health inequality in the UK has got worse, and this will have worsened in recent months.

Our leisure services are much valued by our communities and have been especially badly affected by current restrictions. Recovering and adapting these, as well as continuing on with the review of leisure opportunities across the district as was agreed prior to the crisis, will be a priority - supporting local residents' health and well-being will be more important than ever.

What matters to us is that local people can live healthy and happy lives whatever their background or life situation. Arts and culture, sports, and social spaces like pubs, cafes and community venues: these have been such an important part of our lives and local economy, how do we support their recovery in the months to come?

3. Affordable Housing and Homelessness

We all need an affordable and decent home to live in, and ensuring everyone in the district can access decent housing, must remain a top priority for the council. This is even more important now as the economic downturn caused by the crisis will see many local people's incomes suffer. We also need to support people and families who have been immediately affected by the crisis and facilitate sustainable housing solutions. The council's own house-building programme can play a small role in supporting the local economy and jobs. And we need to ensure that all privately rented homes are at a good standard. We need to understand too how the council may have to adapt its local plan and planning policies to new ways of working and living, as well as responding to the demands which central government will continue to put on us around numbers of houses to be built in the district.

Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, Stroud district had a pressing housing need, with 2940 people on the Housing register (at 8 June 2020). The severity of housing needs within that total vary, but 436 were considered to meet the statutory definition of homelessness and 292 were reported to be living in "insanitary or overcrowded" accommodation – some will be in both categories, as will 378 who needed to move on medical or welfare grounds.

This recovery work stream will encompass action to tackle housing needs on a variety of fronts, such as: increasing supply of affordable homes of all tenures, action to prevent housing debt in all sectors, action to provide temporary housing where homelessness arises and action to ensure that best use is made of housing stock in all tenures.

Many may now be considering working from home on a more regular basis and adapting their homes for greater home working. This may have positive opportunities for the regeneration of rural communities, and encourage local retrofitting to adapt homes and reduce their winter running costs.

Collaboration with key partners such as local housing associations and registered providers will be vital to success.

4. Environment and Climate Change

As the lockdown saw road traffic cease and people stay at home, it felt as if nature has had a chance to breathe again and recover. Long before the coronavirus emergency arrived, we were in another emergency, as human activity makes rapid changes to the climate and threatens the social and economic fabric of our district and indeed viability of life on earth.

We need to change our ways and learn how to live well in a rapidly changing climate and reduce greenhouse emission to ensure our planet can support human life beyond the next generation.

In 2018 the council declared a climate emergency and committed to work towards becoming a carbon neutral district by 2030. We are fortunate in that in our communities there is so much support for making the changes that are needed, and expertise amongst local people, businesses and organisations to help shape the solutions, reducing our carbon emissions, and building resilience into our natural surroundings. The Stroud District Climate Action Network is just one example showing how communities are collaborating and taking the lead in local action to tackle the climate emergency.

The council's 2019 Environment Strategy set ~~some~~ clear priorities for the council to follow in creating a plan for 2030: a changing climate, a circular economy, our homes and buildings, and sustainable communities. Our emerging climate strategy and action plan will be an important catalyst for a just transition to a low carbon economy of the future, where growth is clean and sustainable, nature has a chance to recover and we keep wealth local and fair.

Place Leadership

As we move from the response to this crisis into recovery we will search for opportunities to modernise and transform, as well as simply restore our services to the community – looking for ways to deliver in a more efficient, effective and sustainable way.

There is an opportunity to enhance and restore trust in local democracy as we have a conversation with our communities about how local citizens, community groups and local business are involved in decisions that affect their lives, and what changes the district council can make to the way it goes about its business.

What lessons can be learnt from this crisis and what good practices would we like to hold onto? As we press the reset button on the Council's plan for the coming years, and take stock of how the crisis has affected local government finances, we need to review our priorities and our projects, and make sure resources are directed to where they will be most effective.

There will be hard choices ahead for all of us, as well as new opportunities. Now is the time to strengthen existing partnerships, and forge new ones, so we work together to understand the challenges our district faces, and what solutions might look like.

Internal Recovery & Modernisation

As a local organisation with a large workforce, the council itself has been impacted by the crisis and will need to plan its own internal recovery. Many of the lessons learnt from this crisis as well as how to recover from it will apply equally to internal as well as external recovery. It is recognised that much of the internal recovery will be operational and led by officers, however elected members have an important strategic role to play in the interface between how the organisation is internally organised and how effective and accountable it is in its allocation of public resources, and the services and support it provides to local citizens.

What will success look like?

With so much uncertainty in our world at present, this emerging strategy deliberately does not set out solutions, but creates a framework and starting point for the work to begin. However, early on in this process, we shall need to determine what success looks like. The key question will be – have the people, businesses and communities of Stroud District fully recovered from the Covid-19 crisis, and have we ‘built back better’?

Complementing Other Recovery Plans

This strategy is intended to complement other recovery planning going on in Gloucestershire, and SDC will participate in, collaborate with and support the following:

- The Local Resilience Forum is leading on the emergency response, bringing together all emergency and frontline services, the NHS and public health, police and county and district councils. The LRF will have a role in managing the recovery from the current restrictions.
- GFirst LEP has been tasked by central government with managing a sector-led approach by businesses across the county.
- The Gloucestershire Joint Economic Growth Committee will coordinate the county-wide approach to economic recovery, in collaboration with Leadership Gloucestershire, which brings together leaders of councils, NHS, the LEP and Police and Crime Commissioner.

- Individual recovery plans developed by the towns and parishes of our district.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Each work stream will adopt a similar approach to recovery and renewal, and opportunities to ‘join up’ processes will be taken wherever appropriate, for example in engaging our communities and key partners in a conversation across all work streams to help determine overall priorities.

Initial steps in relation to recovery will focus on gathering evidence, engagement and consultation activity and the taking of immediate and short term actions to address identified issues and opportunities, taking special care to complement and add value to the work of our key partners such as GFirst LEP and the County Council.

We will set out a planned transition from recovery towards a vision and plan for longer term renewal. This will in effect become the Council’s new Corporate Delivery Plan. The detailed timetable and process for this will be agreed by members.

Appendix A: Resources and Good practice

Resources

- SDC existing CD Plan and its priorities
- Existing and emerging Council Strategies and Plans especially on priorities like Health and Well Being; Carbon Neutral 2030; Housing; Local Plan
- The Government's Our Plan to Rebuild roadmap
- https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/884171/FINAL_6.6637_CO_HMG_C19_Recovery_FINAL_110520_v2_WEB_1_.pdf
- UN Sustainable development goals 2020-2030
- Power in Place: District Councils Network Five Point Plan Manifesto for Recovery: <https://districtcouncils.info/influencing/power-in-place-district-councils-five-point-manifesto-for-recovery/>

Best Practice

Albert, Canada

A practical action plan with internal and external workstreams and measurable outcomes, what does success look like:

<https://stalbert.ca.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=28475&GUID=E3B92CAF-059A-4DE2-9B63-F8CFA3B86D88>

Liverpool LEP: sign up to help them 'Build Back Better'

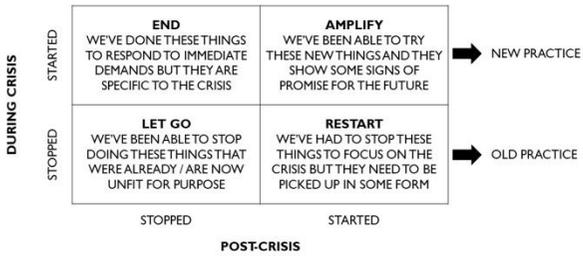
<https://liverpoollep.org/build-back-better/>

Paris online 'I've an idea': <https://www.paris.fr/pages/madame-la-maire-j-ai-une-idee-3971#idee-paris-c-est-quoi>

From the RSA

WHAT PRACTICE ARE WE SEEING IN COMMUNITIES, INSTITUTIONS, POLICIES?

Understanding crisis-response measures
Collective Sense-making



ACTIONS

Understanding crisis-response measures

Collective Sense-making



Doughnut Economics

Kate Raworth and her colleagues have launched the Doughnut Economics Action Lab which will be producing a model that can be scaled down to a local level. The essence of the Doughnut is that we need to live in a safe and just space, with a redistributive and resilient economy: the outer circle is the ecological ceiling where humans can't live without exhausting the planet, while the inner circle is the social foundation, humans must not be allowed to fall below that where their needs cannot be met.

“How can our city be home to thriving people in a thriving place, while respecting the wellbeing of all people and the health of the whole planet?” This question is the one that the city of Amsterdam is now asking itself, and it seems a good question to adapt for ourselves to use, and to frame the process of renewal and recovery. We could adapt it:

How can our district, and the towns and communities within it, be home to thriving people in a thriving place, while respecting the wellbeing of all people and the health of the whole planet?

<https://www.kateraworth.com/2020/04/08/amsterdam-city-doughnut/>

- 8 ways to turn the City Portrait into Transformative Action**
- Mirror** Reflect on the current state of the city through the portrait’s holistic perspective
 - Mission** Create a compelling vision of what it means to become a thriving city
 - Mobilize** Bring together the city changemakers and stakeholders to bring about change
 - Map** Identify existing initiatives, policies and strategies that are already taking the city in this direction
 - Mindset** Embrace the values, ways of working, and new narratives that underpin the deeper shifts required
 - Momentum** Create an iterative process that drives cycles of transformative policy and action
 - Monitor** Assess progress against leading indicators that enrich the city portrait
 - Mmm!** Make it irresistible: be creative, have fun, share learning and stories of success – and celebrate!



Owning the Future: After COVID-19, a new era of community wealth building

‘The present crisis has revealed the distressed state of our local economies and the brittle condition of the local public sector, following decades of underinvestment and disrespect. At the same time, this dual public health and economic emergency has underscored the centrality of community to our everyday lives. As we ready ourselves to rebuild and reconstruct within the shattered post-Covid-19 landscape, we must strive to make the economic recovery the starting point for economic reform and a new birth of community in this country.’

https://democracycollaborative.org/learn/publication/owning-future-after-covid-19-new-era-community-wealth-building?mc_cid=2aa59b79f1&mc_eid=34cba23118

Enhancing Local Democracy

Using digital tools.

<https://medium.com/loti/beyond-the-crisis-how-local-government-can-build-a-positive-legacy-after-covid-3ac6e3d32a24>

London Office of Technology and Innovation (LOTI) and the Greater London Authority (GLA) held a call with borough digital teams and their partners to hear about their work, which is nothing short of inspirational. You can view the slides [here](#).

<https://www.coronaviruslocalresponse.co.uk/#products>

	Pre-Covid	Covid Crisis Response	Potential Legacy
Demographic Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online collaboration / video conferencing tools used extensively by ICT/Digital teams but little adoption elsewhere, particularly by elected members Little digital element to councils' democratic functions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Massively increased comfort level with using online collaborative digital tools by all staff and elected members Democratic functions like committee meetings held online for first time Recognition that moving processes online entails changes to process as well as tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Start of shift to serious and sustained shift towards more ambitious digital democracy methods that involve citizens in more meaningful ways Innovations in democratic functions make them more accessible to general public
Service Reform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Councils' dominant model for addressing local needs is to deliver or commission a top-down service Little widespread innovation on fundamental service model Variable quality of relationships between local authorities and local VCS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rapid (re)connection with local voluntary sector Mass citizen participation in community responses Extensive development and use of match-making platforms Rapid adaptation of existing or development of new services to meet new needs Challenges launched to invite responses to specific needs Different demographics experience inadequacies in some service models Extensive work done to re-evaluate nature of vulnerability and need 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Serious consideration of new operating models based on recognition that councils can play roles other than service deliverer or commissioner - e.g. matchmaker, incentiviser, convener, etc More strategic partnerships developed with local voluntary and private sector organisations based on detailed understanding of each others' strengths Challenge prize methodology for solutions to specific problems become mainstream Fundamental reform to some services based on inadequacies experienced during Covid and understanding of vulnerability
Digital Capability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small number of councils have fully developed digital capabilities - many have more traditional ICT teams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Three different approaches to use of technology made clear: Buy it, Lo-code it, Build it Recognition of need for digital not ICT capabilities Importance of collaboration and working in the open made apparent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many more councils invest in genuine digital capabilities Comms teams engaged in sharing service design work as it happens Strategic collaboration goes mainstream
Data Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technical, data, legal, organisational and cultural barriers to data collaboration known about but little addressed Little common data infrastructure Information Sharing Agreements take months 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognition of hurdles to action due to data collaboration barriers - e.g. silos, lack of data standards New Information Governance agreements being set up and agreed in record time Data rapidly demanded by resilience groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Barriers to data collaboration addressed Information governance approaches standardised Wider number of datasets become permanent data infrastructure Data recognised as core pillar of city resilience

