

The Stroud Town Centre Neighbourhood Development Plan

Report of Examination

Report to Stroud District Council

by the Independent Examiner:

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Summary

1. From my examination of the submitted Stroud Town Centre Neighbourhood Development Plan and its supporting documents, including all the representations made, I have concluded that making of the plan will, subject to the modifications I am recommending, meet the Basic Conditions. In summary they are that it must:
 - Be appropriate, having regard to national policies and advice;
 - Contribute to the achievement of sustainable development;
 - Be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the development plan; and
 - Not breach, and be otherwise compatible with, European Union and European Convention on Human Rights obligations.
2. I have also concluded that:
 - The plan has been prepared and submitted for examination by a qualifying body - Stroud Town Council;
 - The plan has been prepared for an area properly designated; and does not cover more than one neighbourhood plan area;
 - The plan does not relate to “excluded development”;
 - The plan specifies the period to which it has effect – 2015 to 2035; and
 - The policies would, once some are modified, relate to the development and use of land for a designated neighbourhood area.
3. I recommend that the plan should proceed to a Referendum. This is on the basis that I have concluded that making the plan will meet the Basic Conditions, once modified, and all legal requirements.
4. If the plan goes forward to Referendum, I recommend that the Referendum Area should be the same as the Town Council’s civil parish area.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 I am appointed by Stroud District Council (the District Council), with the support of the Stroud Town Council (the Town Council), who is the Qualifying Body, to undertake an independent examination of the Stroud Town Centre Neighbourhood Development Plan, as submitted for examination.
- 1.2 I am a planning and development professional of 40 years standing and a member of NPIERS' Panel of Independent Examiners. I am independent of any local connections and have no conflicts of interests.

The Scope of the Examination

- 1.3 It is the role of the Independent Examiner to consider whether making a neighbourhood plan meets the "Basic Conditions." These are that the making of the Neighbourhood Plan must:
- Be appropriate , having regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State;
 - Contribute to the achievement of sustainable development;
 - Be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the development plan (see Development Plan, below) for the area; and
 - Not breach, and must be otherwise compatible with, European Union (EU) and European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) obligations.
- 1.4 Regulations also require that the Neighbourhood Plan should not be likely to have a significant effect on a European Site or a European Offshore Marine Site either alone or in combination with other plans or projects.
- 1.5 In examining the Plan I am also required to establish whether:
- The Neighbourhood Plan has been prepared and submitted for examination by a qualifying body;
 - The Neighbourhood Plan has been prepared for an area that has been designated under Section 61G of the TCPA as applied to neighbourhood plans by section 38A of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (PCPA).
 - The Neighbourhood Plan meets the requirements of Section 38B of the PCPA (i.e. the Plan must specify the period to which it has effect, must not include provisions about development that is excluded development, and must not relate to more than one Neighbourhood Area); and
 - The policies relate to the development and use of land for a designated Neighbourhood Area in line with the requirements of Section 38A of the PCPA.
- 1.6 Finally, as independent Examiner, I must make one of the following recommendations; that the Plan -
- a) should proceed to Referendum, on the basis that it meets all legal requirements; or
 - b) once modified to meet all relevant legal requirements, should proceed to

Referendum; or

- c) does not proceed to Referendum, on the basis that it does not meet the relevant legal requirements.

- 1.7 If recommending that the Plan should go forward to Referendum, I am also then required to consider whether or not the Referendum Area should extend beyond the Neighbourhood Area to which the Plan relates. I make my recommendation on the Referendum Area at the end of this Report.

The Examination process

- 1.8 I commenced examination of the plan in February 2016 once appointed. The default position is that neighbourhood plan examinations are conducted by written representations. However, I considered it necessary to hold a public hearing on certain matters on which I required clarification by some of the parties in person or to hear oral evidence. This was on a focused range of issues.
- 1.9 A public hearing took place on the 18th March 2016 at the Subscription Rooms, a commonly used meeting place within the town centre. I carried out unaccompanied site visits in advance, as well as an accompanied visit before I opened the hearing.
- 1.10 Given recent changes to part of the Guidance, I had asked the main participants to address me on the latest position on housing need and supply at the hearing. In addition I asked both Councils at the hearing to send me their suggested changes to one policy and one plan, which I address later in my report. I have taken both these suggestions into account.

The Examination documents

- 1.11 In addition to the legal and national policy framework and guidance (principally The Town and Country Planning Acts, Localism Act, Neighbourhood Plans Regulations, the National Planning Policy Framework and the Planning Policy Guidance) together with the development plan (see section 3), the relevant documents that were furnished to me, and were identified on the Town Council's and Council's websites as the neighbourhood plan and its supporting documentation for examination, were:
- Stroud Town Centre Neighbourhood Development Plan with appendices – Submission Draft
 - Basic Conditions Statement with Evidence Base appendices;
 - Consultation Statement and appendices; and
 - Sustainability Report with annexes.

The Qualifying Body and the Designated Area

- 1.12 Stroud Town Council is the Qualifying Body for the geographical area that includes the neighbourhood plan area. The Council designated the Town Centre – as defined on Map 1 of the plan – as the Neighbourhood Area in July 2014. There is no other neighbourhood plan for this area. The civil parish area of the Town Council extends beyond the town centre boundary, also shown on Map 1.

The Town and the Town Centre as Neighbourhood Plan Area

- 1.13 Stroud lies at the convergence of five valleys, located on the A46, about five miles from J13 of the M5. The town is a former industrial centre with a historic centre. The Cotswold Canals that served the town are now part disused and in the process of restoration. The railway, which overtook them, has a local station and a direct line to London. The town is surrounded by the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
- 1.14 The town centre is characterised by independent retailers, few multiples, a range of public and cultural buildings, churches, pubs, health facilities and a well-attended Farmers' Market. The town centre has few residents but a number of employers (Ecotricity, a leading renewable energy firm, being the largest by some margin) and a lively social and cultural life. There are some 2000 people who have their normal place of work in the plan area (town centre and Fromeside Industrial Estate); there are also good primary, secondary and tertiary education facilities including South Gloucestershire and Stroud College. The town centre has a number of green spaces.
- 1.15 The historic core is a conservation area, with some 95 listed buildings. Some 68% of the buildings are in retail or commercial use the remaining being in residential, cultural, educational and services uses. There are some 500 people resident in the plan area. Accommodation is mainly flatted (78%), privately rented (56%) and predominantly one-bed (52%) and two-bed (21%).
- 1.16 The Local Plan notes the town centre, "... as the District's principal commercial centre [it] underperforms..." and faces fierce competition from larger surrounding centres. There are some 234 retail/café/financial services units with a vacancy of about 10%. Merrywalks is a purpose-built shopping centre, now looking somewhat tired.
- 1.17 Transport and access are significant local issues. These include the A46 running through the town centre, congestion, traffic flows and railway lines forming barriers, narrow footways, poor environments for walkers and cyclists, awkward crossings and difficulties navigating to available parking.

2. Neighbourhood Development Plan preparation and public consultation

- 2.1 The Neighbourhood Plan grew out of the local community's significant concerns about the state of the town centre and the failure of previous "blueprints and plans" to deliver the necessary change, past initiatives being listed at 1.2.4-8. In particular, the Cheapside Neighbourhood Opportunities report "... led the Town Council to consider how and the people of Stroud might have more influence in shaping the future development and regeneration of the town centre, where there is a lot of unused land" (1.2.9). A well-co-ordinated statutory plan, harnessing local energy and focused on the town centre was seen as giving the Town Council the power to influence and guide future change to allow the town centre to realise its potential (from the Forward).
- 2.2 The plan has been prepared by a volunteer team and has involved some 2,500 people in its preparation. The launch event took place in July 2014. This was followed by an initial consultation period over September/October to identify issues; open questions were used at local events and meetings. A dedicated website went

live in September and a vision for the town centre was developed and presented at a large-scale public event in November 2014, attended by 400 people.

- 2.3 During January/March 2015 a series of themed workshops took place, addressing various interests such as business, residents, housing, environment, culture and transport. By March 2015 the process had reached the stage of Options consultation and engagement with the three main agencies concerned with environmental assessment. By October 2015 the plan had reached a pre-consultation version, on which consultation took place over October/November. This was accompanied by public events including an exhibition, a pop-up shop and a presentation to Transition Stroud. And throughout the stages of consultation the Town Council consulted with local business interests.
- 2.4 Publicity on the progress of the plan was achieved through events, meetings, presentations, the website, a residents newsletter (with a circulation of some 7000 people), email, twitter announcements, advertising banners, as well as articles in the local press. All told some 2,500 people were estimated to have been involved at some stage. The Consultation Statement sets out the key issues raised by statutory bodies, the main areas of public comments, as well as including (at Annex 2) a comprehensive summary of the comments on the Reg 14 stage.

Environmental Assessment and EU Directives

- 2.6 Under Article 3(3) and 3(4) of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive 2001/42/EC SEA is required of plans and programmes which “determine the use of small areas at a local level”. The District Council is the “responsible authority” and must determine whether the plan is likely to have significant environmental effects. The Council issued a screening opinion in November 2015, which concluded that the plan would not be likely to have such effects, on the basis that it contained no site allocations.

European Sites and the Habitats Directive

- 2.7 The earlier Draft NDP was submitted ahead of adoption of the Local Plan and so, to respond to potential concerns from Natural England, HRA was carried out which concluded that the NDP “... will support and reinforce the policies and mechanisms included in the Stroud Local Plan to address potential significant impacts on Rodborough Common. On this basis the District Council concluded at the same time (as the SEA determination) that the plan would not be likely to have a significant effect on European Designated Sites.

Examination version – public consultation

- 2.8 The Draft Plan was submitted to Stroud District Council in December 2015. The Council subsequently published the Draft Plan, under Reg 16, with all supporting documents, for a 6-week period of public consultation, closing on 5th February 2016.
- 2.9 A total of six representations were made: Historic England, Network Rail, SDC Asset Management, Rachel Russell, Sport England and Fair Play SW. Some of the points that the representations raised were issues that I considered required clarification or oral evidence. Coupled with queries of my own, I decided to hold a public hearing on selected topics, which formed the agenda for the session and ranged around the plan’s approach to housing development, the site specific “allocations”, Local Green Spaces, retail policy and some questions around car parking.

Human Rights

- 2.10 I have no reason to believe that making the plan breaches or is incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights.

Plan period

- 2.11 The neighbourhood development plan states clearly on the cover and in section 7.1 that the plan covers the period 2015 to 2035, while the recently adopted District Local Plan covers the period to 2031.

3. The Neighbourhood Plan in its planning and local context

National policies and advice

- 3.1 The neighbourhood plan must have regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State and contribute to the achievement of sustainable development (the first two basic Conditions). Paragraph 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) is concerned with neighbourhood planning: “The application of the presumption [in favour of sustainable development] will have implications for how communities engage in neighbourhood planning. Critically, it will mean that neighbourhoods should:

- *“develop plans that support the strategic development needs set out in Local Plans, including policies for housing and economic development; [and]*
- *plan positively to support local development, shaping and directing development in their area that is outside the strategic elements of the Local Plan;”*

- 3.2 The plan must give sufficient clarity to enable a policy to do the development management job it is intended to do; or to have due regard to Guidance. For example, para 042 of the Guidance explains that:

“A policy in a neighbourhood plan should be clear and unambiguous. It should be drafted with sufficient clarity that a decision maker can apply it consistently and with confidence when determining planning applications. It should be concise, precise and supported by appropriate evidence. It should be distinct to reflect and respond to the unique characteristics and planning context of the specific neighbourhood area for which it has been prepared.”

- 3.3 Also, in relation to allocations, there has to be evidence to support the particular policy, notwithstanding it may express a strong and well-intentioned aspiration or concern of the local community; the relevant policy sections. Paragraph 040 of the Guidance (recently revised) includes:

“While there are prescribed documents that must be submitted with a neighbourhood plan or Order there is no ‘tick box’ list of evidence required for neighbourhood planning. Proportionate, robust evidence should support the choices made and the approach taken. The evidence should be drawn upon to explain succinctly the intention and rationale of the policies in the draft neighbourhood plan or the proposals in an Order.

A local planning authority should share relevant evidence, including that gathered to

support its own plan making, with a qualifying body

Neighbourhood plans are not obliged to contain policies addressing all types of development. However, where they do contain policies relevant to housing supply, these policies should take account of latest and up-to-date evidence of housing need.

In particular, where a qualifying body is attempting to identify and meet housing need, a local planning authority should share relevant evidence on housing need gathered to support its own plan-making”.

- 3.4 The latter references to housing need were added shortly before the examination commenced. While the plan makes no new housing allocations, as such, it does address the issue of housing supply and so I had asked the local authority and Town Council to address me on the latest position, which they did at the hearing and I deal with under the relevant policies.
- 3.5 Statement of Basic Conditions sets out at section 4 and appendix B how the Town Council considers that the plan meets the relevant Framework policies; and the national Planning Practice Guidance (the Guidance). In addition, at section 5, it sets out how the plan contributes to achieving sustainable development.

The Development Plan - strategic policies

- 3.6 The neighbourhood development plan must be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the development plan for the area. The development plan for the plan area comprises the Stroud District Local Plan (adopted in November 2015).
- 3.7 The Statement of Basic Conditions sets out, in section 6 and Appendix C, which policies the Town Council considers to be the relevant strategic ones and the relationship of the NDP to them. Strategic policies (in the context of their strategic objectives) are deemed to include:
- SO1 Accessible Communities (Policy SA1 allocates sites within the Stroud valleys for 450 new dwellings, only one of which is in the NDP area);
 - SO2 Local economy and jobs (Policy CP3 identifies Stroud as a primary focus for growth and development and significant levels of jobs and homes;
 - SO3 Town centres and rural hinterlands (Policy CP12 defines Stroud as “Principal Town Centre, where vitality and viability should be maintained and enhanced, including the local markets);
 - SO6 Our districts distinctive qualities (Policy CP14 provides a checklist for quality design and development.
- 3.8 The District Council considers all Local Plan policies are strategic policies though acknowledges that some may not be relevant to the plan area. While this position is not consistent with the Guidance, it has not affected my consideration of the plan.
- 3.9 In terms of housing need the development plan has only very recently been adopted and is based on an up-to-date position on housing need and supply. Strategically, I was advised that there is no need to allocate more land beyond the one allocation in the neighbourhood plan area.

The Neighbourhood Plan and its objectives

- 3.10 The aim of the plan is to provide a framework for sustainable development (2.1.1). The heading of the plan is: “Shaping the heart of Stroud” and the strapline is a summary of its vision - to make “Stroud town centre [is] a welcoming, healthy, thriving place.” These are repeated in 2.3.1.
- 3.11 The plan sets out the key issues facing the town centre in the Overview section and at 2.2.1 and at Appendix 4. These include concerns about the long-term viability of the shopping centre, the quality of the town centre environment, poor and unsafe conditions for pedestrian and cyclists, difficulties in finding parking space and the lack of green spaces.
- 3.12 At the hearing the Town Council explained the four main drivers for the change that the policies in the plan are *together* designed to achieve: to give confidence around the identified development opportunities (providing a positive message and a sense of direction), providing a more positive welcome to the town centre (whether by car – finding a space – bus, cycle or walking), increasing the population (offering greater diversity, activity, dwell time and so on) and to enhance the public realm.
- 3.13 The vision for the town centre (page 7) builds on the three pillars of Making the town centre more welcoming; Making the town centre healthier; and Making a thriving town centre. A series of objectives are set out under these three main headings to achieve the overall goals. There are five cross-cutting themes: Sustaining the economy of the town centre; Improving access, strengthening the social and cultural fabric; Enhancing the environment; and Creating a healthier town centre and a series of objectives to achieve them, set out in a schedule on page 29.
- 3.14 The plan divides the town centre into seven zones to aid analysis and policy formulation. The plan itself – explained in “How the plan will deliver the vision” – is divided into two main parts: Development policies and what it describes as “promotional policies”. The development policies are themselves divided into two parts: Area policies which relate to the whole plan area and zonal policies, which relate mainly to specific sites, in each of the different zones.
- 3.15 There are also some “promotional policies” which I deal with later (see section 7) as well as a final section (D) on “How it will happen” which also lists the projects that the plan sees as contributing to meeting the various policies. This is very helpful in clarifying how the plan’s aims will be achieved in practice and by when. Lastly, the plan has a short chapter (4.3) on management and monitoring, together with a schedule on “How the plan fits together”.
- 3.16 Appendices cover definitions, key facts, a SWOT analysis, issues identified in consultation, local heritage assets criteria, public realm design principles and infrastructure requirements. Finally there is a pull-out Proposals Map.
- 3.17 Overall, the plan is a very well-presented and laid-out document, with clear mapping, pictures and illustrations that complement the text and a structure that is easy to follow.

4. Overview

- 4.1 The plan is a form of manifesto for change. While it contains no new site allocations as such, it sets out clearly both town centre-wide and site-specific guidance on the

kind of change the local community sees is needed. It is very positive towards new development in the key places; it seeks new housing and employment; it addresses key concerns about vacant and under-used land and buildings; and identifies what it considers as valuable and worth protecting in the town centre. It is designed to give confidence to new and current investors in the town centre. It is an ambitious plan yet not couched in dogmatic terms.

- 4.2 My own observation is that, while a very positive document, the plan falls short of providing the framework for change that the town centre probably needs. I see a town centre that is in quite poor shape and which needs some form of intervention beyond the conventional policy-making approach adopted by this plan, which effectively relies on market forces. The neighbourhood plan is primarily focused on a set of aspirations for problem or underused sites, while the core problem lies in the poor town centre offer, where market forces are not working well. Beyond setting out guidelines and preferences it does not provide a framework for the degree of intervention I believe the town centre needs to regenerate.
- 4.3 This does not, however, take away from the plan's positivity and its ability to encourage investment and change; nor does it mean it fails to meet the legal requirements and basic conditions.

5. The area development policies

- 5.1 There are 13 plan-wide policies, some with sub-components, comprising section 3.2. The plan's policies are set out in the context of an introduction, the relevant objectives and followed by an explanation, often all contained on one, well-laid out, page.
- 5.2 Policy **AP1** deals with jobs and businesses. The policy is supportive of new or intensified employment development, subject to certain criteria.
- 5.3 Policy **AP2** concerns retail and social uses and controls changes of use.
- 5.4 Policy **AP3** concerns access and movement and seeks to take opportunities to seek a range of identified improvements. These are set out as a series of aspirations.
- 5.5 Policy **AP4** concerns housing and is in two parts. **AP4a** deals with General Housing (which includes self-build and co-operative forms), which is generally encouraged and supported subject to a range of criteria being met. Policy **AP4b** deals with affordable housing and seeks to complement a development plan policy (CP9) by promoting a community land trust. This is not a land-use policy and so I **recommend** it is deleted and moved to join the Promotional Statements (and see section 7, later).
- 5.6 Policy **AP5** concerns green spaces and is also in two parts: Policy **AP5a** designates five Local Green Spaces, The designation of Local Green Spaces must meet the criteria in the Framework that sets the national policy context for such designations at paras 76 and 77. These relate to, in summary, proximity, scale, being demonstrably special and holding a particular local significance. The evidence for the designations is contained in appendix E of the Basic Conditions Statement. It is not extensive and so formed one of the topics I explored further at the hearing and was a focus of my accompanied site visit.
- 5.7 Stroud District Council has land interests in some of the sites and objected to the designations of two sites. At the hearing clarification was sought as to the scope of the policy and some modifications suggested to me. Overall, I found that the proposed

designations met the criteria in the Framework. The mapping of the designations on the Proposals Map poses two issues: not all are clearly labeled, especially the distinction between Frome Banks and Capel's Mill; and that Capel's Mill is actually only a part of a much larger area extending well beyond the designated plan area (and which forms part of a wider Industrial Heritage Conservation Area in the Local Plan). It makes no sense to me, to designate a small part of this wider space, which has no on-the-ground or natural boundary.

5.8 Given the need for clarity in the policy and the mapping difficulty I **recommend** the following modifications to Policy AP5a and the Proposals Map:

- Insert the following text at the end of paragraph 1 of the Explanation to Policy AP5a:

“Appropriate development which would enhance the enjoyment of the identified Local Green Spaces may be permitted. At Wallbridge and Capel’s Mill such uses may include café/ice cream kiosk, bicycle hire and information centre. Commercial workshops, storage or housing are not likely to be an appropriate form of development in these locations.”

NB. The additional wording relating to possible uses is specific to Wallbridge and Capel's Mill as the wording may not be appropriate for the other locations.

- Annotate each Local Green Space on the Proposals Map with its name and clear boundaries; and
- Remove the area of Capel's Mill on the north side of the Canal from the notation on the Proposals Map.

5.9 Policy **AP5b** seeks to control development over another set of identified green spaces, also show on the Proposals map. At the hearing it was explained that these spaces, which are confined to two main (though extensive) areas of boundary planting, were seen as amenity areas. To achieve clarity I **recommend** that Policy AP5b be modified as follows:

- Retitle to read “*Amenity spaces*” as this is what these spaces really are and what the policy seeks to protect them for;
- Revise opening paragraph of the Policy to read:
 - “*The following spaces (as shown on the Proposals Map) are identified as having amenity and biodiversity value which is of importance to the local community:*” [Leave the rest of the policy as it is]
- Amend the second paragraph of the Explanation as follows:
 - redraft first sentence to read “*The areas referred to in Policy AP5b are those for which their amenity and biodiversity value has been identified in consultation as important to local people.*”
 - delete the second sentence in its entirety.

5.10 Policy **AP6** seeks to protect the setting of the town's surrounding landscape by

ensuring that key views, identified in the policy and shown on the Proposals Map, are taken into account in new developments. The evidence for these precise views in the Basic Conditions Statement is relatively weak but can be discerned from the consultations responses and from site visits. For clarity, I recommend the Policy and Proposals Map be modified as follows:

- In the second paragraph the word “adverse” be inserted before “impact”;
- In the Proposals Map legend the word “Protected” be replaced by “Key”.

5.11 Policy **AP7** concerns Gateways. Five such areas are identified in the policy and on the Proposals Map; the policy seeks to create a stronger sense of arrival and welcome to the town centre with attractive buildings and spaces. This is an important aim of the plan. For clarity as a development management tool I **recommend** that the first sentence of the second paragraph be deleted (“Over the plan period...”).

5.12 Policy **AP8** concerns the heritage of the town centre, does not (helpfully) replicate national or development plan policy and is in two parts: AP8a applies to the Conservation Areas and AP8b local heritage assets. AP8a adds two supplementary local guidance documents to the matters to have regard to. AP8b provides, in an appendix, criteria for judging non-designated heritage assets.

5.13 Policy **AP9** concerns design and is in two parts: AP9a sets out general design principles to be followed; while AP9b seeks to apply the local Public Realm Design Strategy – summarised in an appendix. The final sentence of AP9a (Buildings within the core zone...) is very vague and does not seem well evidenced; I **recommend** it be deleted.

5.14 Policy **AP10** provided protection to five identified buildings of cultural importance. At the hearing it was clarified that only the meeting room at the Old Town Hall was intended to be so protected. I therefore **recommend** that the words “Meeting Room” be added; also that the identity of all the facilities be annotated on the Proposals Map.

5.15 Policy **AP11** concerns the town centre car parks, which also recognises that some are potential development sites. The intention is to retain adequate numbers and convenience of use for the town centre. It is cross-referenced to Policy ZP3, see later. The conclusions on that policy mean that I **recommend** that AP11 be modified so that the words “and railway station” be added to the end of the policy.

5.16 Policy **AP12** seeks improvements to public transport and is in two parts: AP12a seeks general improvements, while AP12b commits the Town Council to review options for relocation of the bus station. As such AP12b is not a land-use policy and I **recommend** that it is deleted and moved to join the Promotional Statements.

5.17 Policy **AP13** supports energy efficiency and small-scale and community-based renewal energy generation.

6. The site specific and zonal policies

6.1 Section 3.3 of the plan contains 11 sets of zone- and site-specific policies, arranged across the six identified zones.

6.2 Policies for the core zone – Zone 1 – deal with shop fronts, the Cornhill/Market Tavern site and some important town spaces.

- 6.3 Policy **ZP1a** references the local *Shop Fronts in the Town Centre Guide* to the consideration of planning applications. To make the policy applicable to relevant applications I recommend that the words “involving alterations to, or new, shop fronts” be inserted between “proposals” and “within” in the policy. The illustrations on pages 50 and 51 would benefit from annotation so their message comes across (are they all positive examples?).
- 6.4 Policy **ZP1b** sets out the plan’s aspirations for an identified development site, which also falls within a Gateway (see Policy AP7): the Cornhill/Market Tavern site. This is not a site allocation and so it is not appropriate for it to read as such. I therefore **recommend** that the latter part of the first sentence be modified to read as follows: “.... Proposals Map that provides the following will be supported.”
- 6.5 Policy **ZP1c** seeks to protect and enhance four important town spaces, identified in the policy and on the Proposals Map. For clarity I **recommend** that the second sentence be modified to read as follows: “Proposals to integrate the Four Clocks with the Subscription Rooms to form an enhanced space that is visually integrated will be supported.” And in the third sentence, the word “will” to be replaced by “to”.
- 6.6 There are three policies in the canal zone – Zone 2 – dealing with a main development site, Cheapside, the Canal Basin Site and the Fromeside Industrial Estate.
- 6.7 Policy **ZP2a** complements the Local Plan allocation (for 30 homes) at the Cheapside development site. It is not a neighbourhood plan site allocation as such but seeks to secure some additional features of the Local Plan allocation, including encouragement to securing more than 30 homes. As such it needs recasting and I **recommend** that it is modified as follows: In the first sentence the words “shall provide” be replaced with “that provides” and that the words “be supported” are added to the end.
- 6.8 Policy **ZP2b** seeks to secure the re-creation of a canal basin at a location where the original canal basin’s stone walls are still in situ. The location of the Canal Basin – which is effectively a site allocation - is shown hatched on the Proposals Map. The site is seen as representing the best opportunity for day-time and overnight mooring place for canal visitors. A slight problem with this policy is that the proposed basin extends beyond the plan’s boundary (the full extent is shown dotted, outwith the plan area). In order to resolve this I **recommend** that the dotted lines outwith the boundary be removed from the Proposals Map, to avoid encroaching into another potential plan area; otherwise, I consider it is still operable for development management purposes.
- 6.9 Policy **ZP2c** seeks to guide the future development of the Fromeside Industrial Estate, which, while providing employment and local services, utilizes town centre land for low-intensity uses and fails to enhance its canal-side setting at a critical location for the development of Stroud as a canal town. For clarity I **recommend** that the policy be modified as follows: In the first sentence the words “shall ensure that” be deleted and after the word “canal” the words “will be supported where”.
- 6.10 There is one policy for the railway zone – Zone 3 – dealing with the railway land and Cheapside car parks area. Policy **ZP3** promotes the development of a significant tract of land either side of the railway station and tracks. This is not an allocation so needs to be read as a promotional policy. I therefore **recommend** that ZP3 be modified as follows:

- Delete the first word “Any”
- Delete the words “should occur”
- Insert the following words after “co-ordinate” - “the delivery of”
- Add the following at the end of the first sentence after “following”- “will be supported:”

- 6.11 There are three policies for the Merrywalks zone – Zone 4 – dealing with the railway arches site, pedestrian/cycle access in Merrywalks and the wider Merrywalks area.
- 6.12 Policy **ZP4a** promotes the development potential of land on the side of Merrywalks (the shopping centre) adjacent to the railway arches, for mixed-use commercial and residential development. It is not a site allocation and so needs to be recast to read as a promotional policy. I therefore **recommend** that the second sentence be modified to read: “Any development scheme that ensures delivery of the following will be supported:”
- 6.13 Policy **ZP4b** promotes improved access. Again, it needs to be recast to achieve the case it advocates, which is well supported by the evidence and public consultation responses. I therefore **recommend** that the opening sentence be modified to read: “Over the plan period, proposals for the improvement of access for pedestrian and cyclists to/from Merrywalks by the following means will be supported:”. In addition, in the final sentence, I **recommend** that the word “adverse” be inserted before “impact”.
- 6.14 Policy **ZP4c** promotes redevelopment of land in the Merrywalks area as shown on the Proposals Map, subject to certain criteria being met. Again it is a promotional policy not an allocation and needs to be recast as such. I **recommend** that the first sentence be modified to read: “Redevelopment proposals for land at Merrywalks, as shown on the Proposals Map, that provide for the following will be supported:”.
- 6.15 There is one policy for the Beeches Green zone – Zone 5 – related to promoting land for intensification or redevelopment in the designated area. Policy **ZP5** is drafted as a promotional policy to secure the intensification of underused land for social infrastructure and new housing.
- 6.16 There is one policy for the Lansdown/Nelson Street zone – Zone 6. Policy ZP6 seeks to support redevelopment of the police station and magistrates courts sites at some point in the future when plans may come forward for them.

7. The promotional policies

- 7.1 Section 3.4 of the plan contains a series of promotional “policies”. These are not land use policies but a series of advocacy statements of intent by the Town Council to achieve certain aims, complementary to the policies in the plan; for example on car parking, town centre promotion, pedestrian priority, greening the town centre, improving Merrywalks and better cycle access. While the supporting text makes these “lie outside the direct control of the planning system” the use of the word “policies” and including them within the main policy section could be confusing.
- 7.2 The Planning Policy Guidance recommends such sections be clearly separate, say in an appendix and made clear as to their status. I am content for this part to be read

within the plan but it needs to be absolutely clear that it is distinct from policy. I therefore **recommend** that section 3.4 be modified in the following way: It becomes a wholly new section (D), entitled *How the Town Council will help deliver the plan*. The sub-heading *Promotional policies* be modified to read *Promotional Statements* and that the word “Policy” be deleted from NP1 - 6 and replaced with the word “Statement”. Section D then becomes E.

8. Referendum Area

- 8.1 The text of the Basic Conditions Statement ends, at 10.1, with a recommendation that the referendum area be extended to the whole of Stroud Parish and not be limited to the designated area. This is because the plan’s boundary contains a limited number of residents and, in any event, the consultation process involved the whole parish. The Town Council considers that the plan affects all of the residents in the parish.
- 8.2 I agree with the Town Council’s reasons, which the District Council also supports.

9 Conclusions and recommendations

- 9.1 I conclude that the plan has been positively prepared and plans for sustainable development. I congratulate the Town Council on taking such a positive approach to the plan’s aspirations for change, housing growth, for regeneration and accommodating sustainable development in the town centre.
- 9.2 Thus, this local community is doing what is at the heart of neighbourhood planning, that neighbourhood planning gives local communities “... *direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood ... Neighbourhood planning provides a powerful set of tools for local people to ensure that they get the right types of development for their community*” The Framework (para 183-4).
- 9.3 From my examination of the submitted Stroud Town Centre Neighbourhood Development Plan and its supporting documents, including all the representations made, I have concluded that making of the plan meets the Basic Conditions if modified in the way I have recommended.
- 9.4 I have also concluded that:
- The plan has been prepared and submitted for examination by a qualifying body - the Stroud Town Council;
 - The plan has been prepared for an area properly designated; and does not cover more than one neighbourhood plan area;
 - The plan does not relate to “excluded development”;
 - The plan specifies the period to which it has effect – 2015 to 2035; and
 - The policies relate to the development and use of land for a designated neighbourhood area.
- 9.5 I recommend that the plan, once modified, should proceed to a Referendum.
- 9.6 If the plan does proceed to Referendum then I recommend that the Referendum Area should be the same as Stroud Parish - the Town Council’s civil parish area.

- 9.7 Finally, I congratulate the Town Council and its volunteers for all the hard work that has clearly gone into the drafting of what is such a well-presented plan. And I offer my thanks to both Town and District Council officers for their support in making the examination (including the hearing) so smooth.

John Parmiter FRICS FRSA MRTPI

Independent Examiner

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8 April 2016