

# The Weave, Open Meeting – 19<sup>th</sup> October

## Report of workshop discussion:

### 1. General discussions

The Weave is interested in the relationship between town, canal and countryside; the academicians will be asked to define an appropriate geographical area. Stroud town has a zone of influence beyond its administrative boundaries. For example it could act as a “clearing house” for tourism.

The success of the town centre traders is vital to the town’s prosperity. Revitalisation of the town and countryside is the whole point of the canal restoration.

#### 1.1 Disconnected Stroud

Physical links between the canal and the town centre need to be addressed – the success of the “Lock Keepers” has been a catalyst for bringing forward work to regenerate Wallbridge Upper Lock. Further ideas for developing a piazza at Cheapside Wharf were outlined as a way of strengthening the links. Other options were for additional ways of crossing the railway line, such as a retractable level crossing and bridging from the Dudbridge cycle track to Post Office Lane.

Apart from the canal restoration, similar problems of disconnection exist elsewhere such as with Stratford Park, the area around the goods shed, Nelson Street and the old bowling alley area – and in terms of networks.

The role of Stroud as a Cotswold visitor destination attracting visitors and incomers was contrasted with local people’s often negative perception of the town. This is reflected on the ground by the difference between “top and bottom of town”. What will the canal offer local people? A need to make the most of the cross town routes it offers, open space and wildlife corridors.

The “top and bottom of town” is also a matter of scale of development with independent traders largely in the small units at the top of town with still empty, larger units, designed for nationals, in Merry Walks.

The disconnections are challenges to access, often making the town appear unattractive and unwelcoming. There are tensions between pedestrianisation and traffic flow, a need to make the most of spaces such as “greening” the area outside the sub-rooms

#### 1.2 What would a successful Stroud be like?

People don’t only visit a town to shop, they need places to meet people, experience events and exhibitions, use cafes, and experience the ambience of the place. Stroud already has much to offer in this regard – industrial and architectural heritage, unique social history and cultural significance. Its landscape setting makes it the best site for a town in the Cotswolds, akin to an Italian hill top town.

Stroud has a strong arts heritage and many artists living in and around the valleys. The International Textile Festival is an example of how the arts can have a major economic impact on the local economy. An arts centre, galleries and more places to buy art are needed, as are other visible signs of the arts in town – such as public art. How to make the existing venues more visible and engaged?

Stroud has a reputation for being “green” and there are many examples of this ranging from the work of the Stroud Valleys Project, through the Farmer’s market, local food initiatives, apple town and attractive parks. The role of greenspace should be emphasised as an important way of increasing the health of a population, balancing the needs of wildlife, ameliorating climate change as well as improving the attractiveness of the urban spaces. This should include improved access to and management of nearby countryside.

It would also be a town where the many groups and organisations were better networked.

It would not be a town where nationals had taken over the high street at the expense of independent traders, where new development was only profit led and ignored the local community, the town’s heritage and landscape setting. It was hoped that the Weaves involvement with the Strategic Canal Forum chaired by Neil Carmichael would help address this.

The Neighbourhood Planning Bill was seen as another way of addressing this issue.

### 1.3 Delivering Improvements

A scaling of work was suggested as a way of developing a way of delivering projects. This would address issues of beneficiaries, investment, fund-raising and community ownership.

Small scale, and quick wins, could include signage, street planting, community involvement in projects, street furniture and sitting places.

Medium scale could include things such as “the hanging gardens of NCP Car Park” and larger ones bridging the railway etc.

All of this should be held in a five year strategy.

## 2. Focused discussions

### Increasing visitor experience

Cohesive interpretation and signage

Open-up Stroud’s hidden passage ways

Promote the canal

Stroud Special – a programme of activities and guides (people)

Profiling the arts

More greenery and linked green space as alternative routes

Clean and tidy, decorate shops, improved paving, surfacing High Street in particular

Displays in empty shops – include local history, people’s stories

Resolve traffic movements around and through town

Improve pedestrian access

Develop four entry points

Promote local heritage

#### Promoting Local

Build on the success of the festivals – find ways to continue the “buzz” throughout the year

A gallery/arts centre for local artist to show and sell

Develop the industrial heritage – a centre

Commission public art

Increase the profile of local engineering and made goods/services – buy local guide (Gill Plank?)

Increase use of local food

Develop local sourcing of other rural goods such as timber, fuel and wool

Engage local people

Develop positive stories in the press – image making, unique selling point

Improve accommodation for visitors

Improve and support networks of active people and encourage co-operation

Develop gateways in and out of town to maximise the use of the canal and local countryside for recreation and day trips

Revisit the role of shop fronts – information points for organisations such as the National Trust, Hawkwood etc.

#### Building the Arts Influence

Include SVA in discussions

Make more of the Open Studios energy as a way of linking to the area's economy

Work with other local experts who have expertise and a national profile (Lizzi to send contact details)

“pop-up” exhibitions in shops – empty and shop windows

Reconnect arts scene with local people

Open an arts centre, develop gallery space

Engage Stroud College – bring their work into town

An art development officer

Use the arts to engage people with a sense of place

Temporary installations – lighting etc.

“Big” Public art

Increase the role of the Museum

#### 4. The Academicians Visit

Alan, Gerb, Lizzi, Stella and Steve offered to attend. (Ron will be at the market but the academicians could be asked to visit)