Stone Strategic Plan 2025–2028

Plain English Version

1. Introduction

This Strategic Plan sets out the council's main priorities for the years 2025 to 2028.

In May 2025, Stone Parish Council formally adopted the style of a Town Council. This reflects the size and growth of our community and our ambition to play a stronger civic role. As part of this change, we created the role of Town Mayor to strengthen leadership and community representation.

This plan builds on the previous 2021–2024 plan. It continues major projects such as improvements to Council facilities and better digital communication with residents.

We are also asking residents whether the name of the parish should change to better reflect the area's identity. Any change would only happen after public consultation and approval from the borough council.

2. Vision and Values

Our Vision

To support a strong, inclusive and successful community through responsible leadership, practical innovation and partnership working.

Our Core Values (INSPIRE)

- **Integrity –** We act openly, honestly and take responsibility for our decisions.
- **Nurture –** We create the right conditions for people, ideas and nature to grow and flourish.
- **Sustainability –** We plan for the long term and manage environmental and financial resources responsibly.
- **Participation –** We listen to residents and involve them in decisions that affect the community.
- **Innovation –** We are open to new ideas, technology and better ways of working.
- **Respect –** We value different backgrounds, experiences and perspectives.
- **Equity –** We aim to ensure fairness in access to services and opportunities.

3. Context

National Picture

Local councils are operating in a time of significant change. There are national commitments to reduce carbon emissions, increasing use of digital technology, and growing pressure on public services.

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are still being felt. Many people experience loneliness or mental health challenges, particularly young people and older residents. Local leadership plays an important role in supporting community wellbeing and bringing people together.

Local Picture

Stone continues to grow, with new housing and infrastructure in areas such as St James Pit and Crossways. Increased traffic, air quality concerns and pressure on services are ongoing challenges, especially with the impact of the Dartford Crossing.

The council has acted to protect valued community assets, such as supporting the preservation of the Lads of the Village pub. We continue to press for improved health services, better access and connectivity at Stone Crossing railway station, and improvements to walking and cycling routes along London Road.

4. Our Approach

We aim to take a practical and balanced approach to local government.

We are committed to becoming carbon neutral as an organisation by 2030. This means reducing emissions from our buildings, services and operations.

In our planning and budgeting we aim to:

- Be open and transparent.
- Involve residents early in decisions.
- Work with partners and community groups.
- Focus on long-term benefits.
- Be ambitious but realistic about what we can deliver.

We recognise that we cannot deliver everything ourselves. Sometimes our role is to support, influence or bring partners together rather than deliver projects directly.

This plan sets clear priorities. We will review progress each year and adjust if needed to ensure delivery remains realistic and affordable.

5. Key Focus Areas

Our work is grouped into five main areas:

1. Council Operations and Governance

Improving how the council works, strengthening performance and preparing for possible changes in local government structures.

2. Community Engagement and Culture

Encouraging participation, civic pride and inclusive community activities.

3. Environment and Estates

Maintaining high-quality public spaces, improving biodiversity and ensuring safe, welcoming green areas.

4. Digital and Innovation

Using technology sensibly to improve services and reduce administrative workload.

5. Hospitality and Enterprise

Running welcoming and financially sustainable community venues.

6. Key Projects

Stone Recreation Ground

Complete the final stage of improvements and increase community use of the site. Support the continued success of Lizzie's Café and develop a balanced programme of activities.

Stone Pavilion

Relaunch the extended Pavilion and increase its use for both private hire and community activities.

Claire Tiltman Centre

Develop community programmes and volunteer-led services. Improve landscaping and explore renewable energy options.

Stone Castle Park and Charles Street Pocket Park

Carry out practical improvements to make these parks safer, more accessible and better for wildlife. Improvements will be proportionate and based on available funding.

London Road Walking and Cycling Improvements

These improvements are led by higher levels of government. The council will support local engagement and provide appropriate resource support to help secure delivery.

Sustainable Travel

Work with county and borough partners to improve walking, cycling and public transport connections.

Tree Planting Plan

Continue annual tree planting and expand wildlife-friendly areas such as orchards, wildflower spaces and pollinator habitats.

Thames Waterfront

Explore whether there are opportunities to improve access and community use of the riverfront.

Neighbourhood Plan Review

Review and update the Neighbourhood Plan to reflect current priorities and growth.

7. Service Areas

Council Facilities

Maintain high standards of safety, accessibility and energy efficiency. Review pricing and opening hours to balance affordability with financial sustainability.

Community Events

Deliver a programme of smaller events throughout the year rather than a single large event. This spreads participation and reduces financial risk.

Communications

Improve both online and offline communication. Continue developing the Community App and offer in-person engagement opportunities such as Meet the Mayor sessions.

Health and Wellbeing

Work with local health partners to promote preventative health and support services that reduce isolation.

Youth Services

Develop a Youth Engagement Plan to support clubs, sports and workshops, and promote them through local schools.

Environmental Awareness

Promote environmental education through signage, allotments and community initiatives.

Governance and Administration

Modernise systems, develop staff skills and maintain high standards of governance. Seek reaccreditation under the national Local Council Award Scheme at Gold level.

Community Safety

Work with the police and community safety partners to support safe public spaces and manage council CCTV responsibly.

8. Financial Strategy

A clear financial plan supports delivery of this strategy.

We will:

- Balance service quality with affordability.
- Maintain appropriate financial reserves.
- Use developer funding (Community Infrastructure Levy) transparently for infrastructure improvements.
- Consider borrowing carefully where it supports long-term value.
- Seek grants and sponsorship to reduce pressure on council tax.

All financial decisions will be made with long-term sustainability in mind.

9. Performance Management

We will monitor delivery through:

- Twice-yearly performance reviews.
- Regular reporting to the People and Performance Committee.
- Annual public reporting.
- Clear tracking of progress against key objectives.

We use a digital performance system to track progress and ensure accountability.

10. Conclusion

This Strategic Plan sets out a focused and realistic programme for 2025–2028.

As a Town Council, we are entering a new phase of civic leadership. By concentrating on clear priorities, maintaining financial discipline and working closely with residents and partners, we aim to support a strong, inclusive and well-prepared community.