

Project Stroud Quick Wins – Stroud News and Journal

JANUARY is traditionally a time of renewal – but for 10 communities in and around Stroud there's an extra reason to celebrate a new start.

For they've all won a share of £10,000, offered by the Market and Coastal Towns Initiative, a programme run by local people who are looking at how to improve life in Stroud and nearby villages. Each has gained an award of between £50 and £250 in the 'Quick Wins' scheme, for ideas that range from opening a new meeting room to clearing wasteland and turning it into a mini park. Grants are available up to a maximum of £1,000.

"We are working hard to develop ideas to help our communities in the long term, but we also want to celebrate what is already happening here!" says Bob Hughes, chair of the Project Stroud steering group which is spearheading regeneration in Stroud and surrounding parishes.

"We are calling these projects 'Quick Wins' because they will make an immediate impact in the community, and they show what can be done to breathe new life into Stroud and villages. All they needed was some quick funding to get them started!"

We take a closer look at three of the successful projects.

RUTH Woodley has very small ambitions – or rather, she has ambitions for the very small. For her Quick Win application will help fund a new baby group in Randwick – somewhere for babies who aren't yet on the move. "I thought there should be something just for the very little ones," Ruth explained. "Somewhere with mats where babies can lie safely without bigger children around, and where carers – whether mums, dads, grandparents or anyone else – can share experiences."

Ruth already runs a toddler group called Sticky Fingers in Randwick Village Hall every Friday. She set it up voluntarily a year ago for small children to do arts and crafts, and enjoy music together. "For over a year, there wasn't a toddler group in Randwick at all, which is why I decided to set one up," Ruth explains. "It has really met a need, and we now have 20 children and their carers coming along. "But it suddenly occurred to me that if I could rent the hall for an hour longer each morning, I could also have a session for babies when the toddlers have finished. The Quick Win money will pay the rent for that extra hour."

The importance of pre-school care has been in the news again recently, because of the invaluable contribution it makes to the intellectual and social skills of young children. But in spite of that, there is currently no direct government funding for toddler groups.

And Ruth herself has personal knowledge of how valued these sorts of groups are. She went along to one when her two children – now aged four and six – were younger. And as well as her voluntary work, she’s also a playgroup leader.

“Since having my own children, I’ve been very involved with these sorts of schemes including, at one time, having a job as a toddler support worker for PATA (the educational charity, Playgroup and Toddler Association). There are some people for whom a baby or toddler group is a lifeline – their only chance to get out from between four walls. It means they can have a cup of coffee and talk to someone who has had less sleep than they have! “The Quick Win money is essential for such a scheme,” Ruth says. “I don’t want to put fees up because it’s often people on lower incomes who benefit from groups like this.” For more information about Sticky Fingers or the baby group, ring Ruth on 01453 758620.

WHITESHILL knows that money doesn’t grow on trees – but they’re hoping apples will. For their Quick Win is going towards an orchard that can be enjoyed by the whole community.

The trees will be planted on part of the playing fields that’s been set aside to encourage wild flowers. “It’s a lovely area,” says Whiteshill and Ruscombe parish councillor, Rebecca Charley, “with views down the Ruscombe Valley. Wild flowers are now reappearing - and we thought how nice it would be to plant some old varieties of apple, plum and pear trees there too.”

Depending on cost, they’re hoping to put in good-sized trees that might even give apples in their first year. And pupils from Whiteshill Primary School will be encouraged to help with the planting. As for picking the fruit, everyone will be invited to come and help themselves.

The parish council is taking advice from Gloucestershire Orchard Group, set up three years ago to conserve, promote and celebrate traditional orchards in the county. “Because people tend to buy their apples from the supermarket, a wealth of different varieties is in danger of being lost,” Rebecca explained. “Yet once these apples were such a part of people’s lives - older residents all have stories about apple scrogging. “A community orchard will allow us to do some education, and provide residents with a healthy eating alternative. “Besides which, if you eat something you’ve picked yourself, it tastes all the better for it!”

WITH her £250 of Quick Win money, Jenny Bailey intends to put Rodborough’s Arts and Crafts heritage on the map – literally. She and her bid-partner, Sheila Maddock, are compiling a walking map that takes people on a three-mile trail around Rodborough, highlighting aspects of the Arts and Crafts Movement. Starting above the Fort, the trail will go over the common, past The Old Lodge, and end up in Box.

“It will include the house where the stained glass artist, Edward Payne, lived and worked for nearly 60 years, and Box Church, which dates back to the early 1950s,” explains Jenny, who lives in Stroud and is an expert on the movement locally.

“Many people don’t realise that places like The Bear of Rodborough and The Old Lodge are Arts and Crafts pubs. And then there are private houses, such as The Yew in Pinfarthings, built by renowned architect Thomas Falconer for Mr Dodd, who was once the chief chemist at Erinoid, the pioneering plastics factory in Stroud.”

The Arts and Crafts Movement began in Britain in the 19th century as a reaction against mechanisation and artifice. In 1893, the architects Ernest Gimson and brothers Sidney and Ernest Barnsley moved to the Cotswolds with the intention of leading ‘a simple life’. They’d been inspired by William Morris, and his ideals of skilled craftsmanship, to set up furniture workshops in Sapperton. Jenny reawakened local interest in the Arts & Crafts Movement last year, as part of the Stroud 700 celebrations, when she gave a series of talks and organised a church trail. Her efforts coincide with a national boost – museums, galleries and historic houses with Arts and Crafts collections and connections have recently joined together in a UK-wide trail to celebrate the work of William Morris and his followers.

And The Victoria and Albert Museum will be holding a major international Arts and Crafts Movement exhibition from March 17-July 24. “I’m currently looking for a venue in the Stroud area in which to hold a Cotswold Arts and Crafts exhibition later this year,” Jenny says. “These craftsmen left us a wonderful legacy, which needs to be appreciated.”

- Anyone who can help Jenny with a venue for her exhibition is asked to call her on 01453 765705.
- More information on the UK-wide trail is available at www.artsandcraftsmuseum.org.uk and www.24hourmuseum.org.uk