

Talks begin on Cheapside revamp

'SITE IS KEY TO TOWN'S FUTURE'

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INTERESTED parties gathered in Stroud for the first time to discuss the way ahead for the redevelopment of the whole of the Cheapside area of Stroud.

The meeting, arranged some time ago by the town's chamber of trade, had extra momentum with the presence of the Hill Paul Regeneration Group.

The group has just exchanged contracts to buy the neglected landmark factory which is the key building at Cheapside.

"We want to act as a catalyst," chamber member Nigel Messenger told the meeting in The Shambles.

"We would like to get things going.

"All interested parties are together for the first time. We want to try and get the ball rolling."

Support came from the meeting's chairman Stroud MP David Drew who said: "I think this has come at a

by Jo Barber

very important time. This to me is the single best reason why Stroud could be regenerated. For me, Cheapside holds the future of Stroud."

The regeneration group, however, has only one year to keep up its payments to complete its £1.3 million purchase of Hill Paul and the adjoining former builders' merchants land.

Development

Group spokesman Glenn Hall explained: "We have picked the ball up but we want to pass it on. We want to work with the planning processes to bring life back into this part of Stroud and pass it to the rest of the town."

So far the group has suggested a mixed development of a café bar, possibly some arts gallery space, offices and penthouse flats might be the way forward for Hill Paul.

Group member David Crownshaw agreed.

He said: "I feel this site is actually ideal for entertainment and leisure."

There were notes of caution however from Stroud District Council's acting director of development and leisure Mike Muston and Malcolm Bushell from Harper Homes which has sold Hill Paul to the group.

There were still a number of imponderables, Mr Muston warned the 40 delegates from local and national organisations present.

He said the key, to a successful development brief was to get something which was viable.

Complications at Cheapside include providing a bus rail interchange in the area, improving pedestrian access over the railway line and providing enough car parking.

While Mr Bushell, who made clear his role as adviser to the group, pointed out the difficulties of working with the half dozen landowners involved and the economic attractiveness or otherwise of various types of new uses for Cheapside.