

Roman replica?

23/11/16

by Andy Read

AMBITIOUS plans to put a replica of the world-famous Woodchester Roman Pavement on permanent display are to be given a second chance of winning National Lottery backing.

Officials at Stroud District Council launched the £5.4 million scheme in a blaze of publicity two months ago.

But a month later the project fell at the first hurdle when the Millennium Commission said it did not meet the necessary criteria for funding.

A consortium of councils and traders has drawn up the plan which would see the replica housed in a specially-designed building in Church Street, Stroud.

Benefits

Backers believe it would become one of the county's top tourist attractions drawing thousands of visitors every year.

The scheme would also involve an entertainments and business centre and would recreate an historic row of almshouses lost to development 40 years ago.

A meeting of Stroud District Council's resources committee on Thursday was asked whether it wanted to scrap the project altogether.

Council chief executive Richard Ollin said the council had already submitted a bid for its Museum In The Park scheme and was finalising details of a second bid for the Subscription Rooms.

"It must be asked whether the council should concentrate its efforts on the project which has the greatest chance of succeeding," he said.

"On the other hand it has been argued that the replica project is an imaginative

one which would have significant benefits for the centre of Stroud."

Councillors decided to commission a £5,000 feasibility study to consider the possible economic benefits of the scheme before deciding whether a bid is likely to succeed.

The mosaic, the largest in northern Europe, depicts Orpheus charming the beasts with his lyre and was discovered in a graveyard at Woodchester 200 years ago.

Despite being regarded as one of the most important Roman discoveries in Europe the pavement has remained buried for more than 20 years.

The replica was painstakingly created by Bristol-based brothers Bob and John Woodward but has not been put on display locally since the 1980s because of the lack of suitable space.

The scheme has drawn opposition from some who claim the money would be better spent opening up the real pavement to public view.



■ The replica of the Woodchester Pavement which could be put on permanent display in Stroud town centre. ★

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