

TOWARDS A PROSPEROUS STAFFORD:
A STRATEGY FOR PROSPERITY

PREFACE

This document has been developed to represent the strategic response to the Council's vision of leading a community which is prosperous.

This strategy does not replace the current policies, strategies and operational frameworks that can improve levels of prosperity evident within the Borough, and which can therefore help the Council to realise its vision in this instance. However, through the development of this document it is evident that real added value can be achieved by considering these documents together. This *Strategy for Prosperity* draws the key issues together for the first time and represents a cross-cutting set of prioritised proposals and targets that we must implement and achieve if we are to realise our vision.

It can therefore be seen that best practice has been carried through from these supporting policy and strategy documents to develop a composite action plan to be implemented over the next four years and beyond. Further, additional actions have been introduced, where necessary, to ensure that this strategy is inclusive to all, and achieves the maximum positive impact on the local community.

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INTRODUCTION

Stafford Borough, situated at the heart of the country, is proud of its productive economy, which is still evident today in its manufacturing and agricultural sectors. However, the economy in Stafford has changed dramatically over recent years, and we are now at a time where we face many challenges to our vitality in the future.

This is the *Strategy for Prosperity* and is the mechanism through which we will respond to these challenges and ensure that our business and resident communities enjoy a prosperous future.

The *Strategy for Prosperity* is presented in the following manner:

1. **Sharing our vision of a prosperous Stafford Borough**, where we present our aspiration of Stafford in the future;
2. **Stafford Borough in context**, how we are positioned in economic terms, community terms and what has influenced the development of this strategy;
3. **Identifying the key strategic themes**, which demonstrate the areas that will be targeted to achieve a prosperous Stafford Borough;
4. **Developing actions**, that will deliver the strategy and produce a sustainable, prosperous economy in Stafford Borough;
5. **Monitoring our progress**, because although there is a need to set challenging goals, it is equally importantly that we are able to demonstrate that we have succeeded.

SHARING THE VISION OF A PROSPEROUS STAFFORD BOROUGH

Our Mission

Stafford Borough Council will:

“LEAD A COMMUNITY AND BOROUGH WHICH IS PROSPEROUS, SAFE, HEALTHY, CLEAN AND GREEN.”

In achieving our mission we will concentrate on core services and responsibilities, which are set to locally determined standards, with robust financial and business management.

Our Vision

Specifically, with respect to prosperity, Stafford Borough Council:

“PLACES GREAT IMPORTANCE ON ENSURING THAT THROUGHOUT THE BOROUGH ITS COMMUNITIES AND CITIZENS HAVE AND MAINTAIN THE BEST AVAILABLE PROSPECTS FOR PROSPERITY, CHOICE & QUALITY OF LIFE.”

This vision will contribute to sustaining the community's quality of life and our environment.

In order for Stafford Borough Council to deliver on this vision and ambition, which is core to the Council's aims for the next four years it must be able to resource its support. The Council's approved Financial Strategy recognises that it "is very important to ensure that resources link in with the Council's objectives, priorities and thus service requirements".

The Financial Strategy and associated action plan covers wide issues relating to funding which will benefit the Council in the delivery of its objectives over the next four years. The Financial Strategy recognises that the Council will not do everything but will make full use of partnerships, external sources of funding that reflect Council priorities in its funding decisions and ensure that ultimately the resources available to the Council are maximised to support its overall aims and objectives.

STAFFORD BOROUGH IN CONTEXT

Achieving a prosperous Borough is a challenging and complex ambition. In a diverse economy and community there will never be a single, simple course of action that will deliver results in an inclusive manner. Indeed, we will need to look outside of our borders to gain an understanding of how Stafford influences its surrounding environment and how this environment impacts upon the prosperity of our Borough.

This section summarises the Borough as it is today, the key issues evident and forces acting upon us. It illustrates the linkages that have been made with existing initiatives and how these have been taken as the cornerstones in the development of this strategy. Importantly, this section demonstrates an understanding of the requirements of our community.

Finally, as we push forward with a framework of ambitious actions that will realise a prosperous future for Stafford Borough, we demonstrate our key achievements of the past. This should instil confidence in our community and partnerships that Stafford Borough Council will achieve its vision.

The Strategy in Context – Influences and making a difference

To understand the community needs and processes already in place an assessment of existing policy and strategic delivery mechanisms (that may influence the relative prosperity of the Borough) has been undertaken. From this exercise it has been possible to highlight the main policies that will positively impact upon the prosperity of the Borough and its residents.

The table below demonstrates the layers of policy as they affect key aspects of prosperity. These policies form the strategic framework that has been used to develop this “*Strategy for Prosperity*”, and the strategic delivery themes that describe the priorities for delivery in this instance. The full list of policy documents that have informed the development of this strategy is included in Appendix 1 to this report.

Policy Area	Regional	Sub-Regional	Local
<i>Economic Regeneration</i>	Regional Economic Strategy Tourism Strategy	Southern Staffordshire Now Tourism Strategies	S.R.B. Bid + Delivery Plans
<i>Infrastructure</i>	Regional Planning Guidance	Staffordshire Local Transport Plan	Local Plan / Local Development Framework
<i>Town Centres</i>	-	-	Town Centre Vision
<i>Rural Issues</i>	Regional Rural Recovery Plan	Staffordshire Rural Economic Strategy	-
<i>Finance</i>	Housing Corporation ADP	-	Housing Benefits Strategy
<i>Communities</i>	Regional Housing Strategy	Staffordshire eGovernment I.E.G. Statement	Community Plan Housing Strategy Cultural Strategy
<i>Council Processes</i>	Audit Commission	-	Financial Strategy

This strategy therefore represents the synthesis of a number of key policy documents. Further, additional priority themes and actions have been developed where necessary. This composite approach will consolidate all activities and bring with it the opportunity to add real value to the community through “*joined-up working*” and collaborative actions. Benefits of this approach include:

- Prioritising actions to eliminate waste, both of effort and limited resources;
- Assigning responsibility thereby eliminating duplication of activity and providing a focus on delivery;
- Making full use of the external relationships we currently support by identifying key partnership groups and partner organisations;
- Providing the justification that our priorities are correct, and address current local needs;
- Ensure a long-term, co-ordinated approach to delivering our vision;
- Gaining the confidence of our community and partners regarding our ability to successfully deliver;
- Promoting those actions that maximise the positive impact upon the community.

An Economy in Context – Just how prosperous is Stafford?

The delivery of a prosperous community is inextricably linked to the economic well being of the Borough. This in turn is largely dependent upon the buoyancy of the employment base. This section assesses how our economy shapes up through the consideration of key indicators of local economic activity. It goes on to highlight some threats that may adversely affect the prosperity of the Borough over the next decade, whilst identifying opportunity areas that may be embraced to overcome these challenges.

The following table provides some key indicators of economic well being:

Indicator	Stafford Data	Comparator	Comment
Unemployment	2.6%	3.4%	Rank 21 st regionally (of 34; highest first)
Wage Levels	£10.14 / hour	90.6% of GB average	NOMIS data (West Mids. average is 91.4% of GB average)
Economic Activity	82 (Staffordshire) - (£10,310)	100 (national index level) – (£12,548)	(index of GDP per head)
Business Start-up	3.27 per 1000 population	3.39 (West Mids)	Also lower than Staffordshire & U.K.
House Prices	£118,500	£115,940 (England & Wales)	-
Retail Index Comparison	102	100 (UK average)	Measure of Stafford town
Index of Deprivation	258	Least deprived Staffordshire district	Ranking out of 354 (most deprived first)
Productivity (GVA)	71 (£18,402 per employed)	100 (national index level - £25,858)	Whole economy (excludes farm agriculture)

The generalised conclusion of an analysis of the above positions Stafford Borough as an area that is not experiencing serious economic pressures. However, with earnings, economic activity and business figures below regional and national averages it is suggested that the Stafford economy is lacking in dynamism, and somewhat sluggish at the present time. An argument can certainly be made that the Stafford economy is in need of a change in gear to equip it for the pace of change anticipated in the future.

There are a number of threats that we must be aware of during the development of this strategy:

- The continued decline in the traditional manufacturing sector, and continuing threats to our major employers;
- The legacy of severe impacts (BSE and Foot and Mouth) on our rural communities;
- Massively increased public sector investment in neighbouring areas (North Staffordshire and West Midlands Conurbations), whilst our current funding streams will disappear;
- Limited identified land available for employment development;
- Impacts of potential Government reorganisation and the potential of regional government.

However, there are a multitude of assets and opportunities that we must capitalise on over the next few years. These include:

- Our strategic location on major national travel routes, and the need to capitalise on ongoing investment (M6 toll road and WCML improvements);
- A high quality natural environment;
- An excellent range of housing and service facilities within the Borough;
- The presence of major employment sectors within the Borough (public sector, manufacturing, emerging high tech and environmental technology companies) and the opportunities presented by Advantage West Midland's cluster development programme;
- High Quality educational establishments (highlighted by the presence of Staffordshire University and Stafford College).

A Community in Context – Our key asset

Stafford Borough comprises an area of approximately 240 square miles in mid-Staffordshire. In terms of area it is the largest Borough in the West Midlands and has a population of 120,000 people. The principal urban centres of the Borough comprise the towns of Stafford and Stone and a number of large villages. Outside the County Town of Stafford there are 33 parishes covering the Borough area. This mixed geographic configuration gives rise to a number of challenges within our community, such as rural isolation and access to opportunities. There are a number of further community focussed issues than need to be considered in the development of this strategy:

- The Borough has is subject to a slow decline in population, with the population ageing roughly in line with national trends;

- There is a notable level of unfitness and disrepair in the housing stock within the Borough, with many homes failing to meet the Decent Homes Standard;
- Pockets of notable deprivation, especially within the Stafford urban area;
- Many debt related issues emerging through community support organisations, with an estimated 6000 households in Stafford reliant on the services of money lenders (estimate of £2m per annum lost to the local economy through excessive interest payments);
- Wage levels 10% below national averages;
- Significant levels of out-commuting from the Borough;
- Pockets of isolation from key services;
- Issues specifically relating to rural areas.

Although not widespread, the issues raised above are directly related to the general level of prosperity within the Borough. Improving access to opportunities and services throughout Stafford Borough will therefore assist in overcoming many of these issues, and promoting a more inclusively prosperous community.

This “Strategy for Prosperity” will underpin and complement the Community Plan for Stafford Borough which itself aims to improve the quality of life in Stafford Borough over the next 3 years and beyond. The Plan identifies a number of priorities for improving your quality of life in Stafford Borough and achieving sustainable development, which are consistent with the Council’s vision with respect to prosperity, such as:

- Planning for the Future
- Employment Opportunities
- Attracting Resources
- Youth and Community
- Health and Lifestyle
- Transportation

These priorities are therefore taken forward in this strategy.

A Council in Context – Working with our Partners

Although this strategy encapsulates our vision for promoting a prosperous economy within Stafford Borough, it will recognise and build upon the excellent work already being carried out. The ongoing effective delivery of this work, together with the delivery of actions emerging from this strategy document, will be central to realising our vision. Stafford Borough Council recognises and welcomes the work undertaken by our operational and community partners and realises the importance of embracing and maintaining a healthy culture of partnership working in the future.

It is clear that many of the actions emerging from this document will need to be delivered in partnership with other organisations. The action plan to this “Strategy for Prosperity” will highlight the delivery partners in each instance,

thereby demonstrating our commitment to “joined up” delivery of services and initiatives.

Indeed, in many instances we have considered the priority actions of our partner organisations within the development of this strategy. Where appropriate, these have been adopted as key delivery actions to which the Borough Council will give priority support in the future.

A Legacy of Achievement – What has been done so far?

This strategy is not a fresh start. Neither has it been developed in isolation with little regard for what has been achieved previously, and indeed continues to be achieved. The previous section acknowledged the fact that much effective work has already been undertaken. Much of this work, based upon previous priorities, can justifiably be seen to continue to deliver our vision for a prosperous Borough. Where applicable, therefore, previous priorities and actions will be adopted within this strategy and action plan, demonstrating a long-term commitment to effective delivery mechanisms, which transcends bureaucratic and administrative timetables. Not only will this preserve and indeed continue the best of the past, it will ensure sustainable delivery in the future.

Some pivotal achievements to date (including putting the right “building blocks” in place that will enable future success) are:

- Ongoing delivery of two economic regeneration programmes (Stafford SRB6 and Stone Market Towns Initiative);
- Improved planning applications process (including fast track process for key employment applications);
- Diversion of core funding to support the delivery of this strategy;
- E-Government Partnership improving access to services for all;
- Staffordshire Technology Park almost full, with significant interest in remaining employment investment sites;
- Significant improvement in the number of outstanding cases for benefits, supplemented by a successful bid for enhanced I.T. to further improve the benefits service.

This snapshot of achievement should serve to instil a high degree of confidence that we will deliver our vision of “***ensuring that throughout the Borough its communities and citizens have and maintain the best available prospects for prosperity, choice & quality of life.***”

Having set the context of the Borough and its community, the following section will define our key strategic themes, which will serve to define how we will realise our vision.

IDENTIFYING THE KEY STRATEGIC THEMES

The previous sections have highlighted many of the key environmental factors that must be considered and addressed if we are to achieve our vision of a prosperous community in Stafford Borough. Ultimately it is necessary to define a number of priority actions to be implemented to achieve this vision. Given the rich diversity of our economic and community environment many of these actions will be interdependent and will cut across professional, departmental and indeed organisational boundaries. However, each and every action must fully contribute to achieving our vision.

To underpin the vision for a prosperous Stafford Borough the Council has adopted a series of ten operationally focused aims. These aims are to:

- P1:** Work with the business community to support the local economy and secure competitive advantage for our Borough;
- P2:** Ensure that the development of the Borough as a destination for inward investment is supported by the provision and encouragement of services, choice within the housing market, leisure opportunities and an environment that also improves the quality of life for residents;
- P3:** Ensure the new Local Development Framework identifies and brings forward new employment sites for the next ten years;
- P4:** Pursue a “fast track” approach to key planning applications, adopt a more proactive stance to pre-application advice prior to submission of planning applications and ensure that recent improvements in the Planning Service are sustained;
- P5:** Work with the Local Strategic Partnership to support the development of the whole Borough as a destination for visitors for retail, culture and tourism purposes;
- P6:** Support and encourage the Stafford Single Regeneration Budget Partnership Board to provide support for existing businesses to grow and develop, address youth unemployment and include the provision of specialist business support for key sectors including technology, tourism and creative industries;
- P7:** Renew the Stafford Town Centre Forum to create a positive and continuing focus for commercial, retail and leisure businesses;
- P8:** Support the rural economy through the Market Towns Initiatives and other measures;
- P9:** Maintain an active role in the North and Southern Staffordshire Partnerships to ensure that Stafford Borough benefits from sub-regional strategies and encourage Advantage West Midlands to invest in the area;
- P10:** Ensure that people within our community have the appropriate advice and assistance to improve their quality of life.

These operational aims will be carried forward and interpreted in the Action Plan that accompanies this Strategy document. To help in defining the action planning process, the “vision for prosperity” and the ten prosperity aims have been synthesised into a series of three strategic themes. These themes have also been developed with regard to the environmental context described

previously. For clarity, each strategic theme will describe a discrete topic area for which appropriate priority actions have been developed.

Theme 1: Prosperity through Business Investment

Developing a diverse and dynamic business base is a key theme of the West Midlands Regional Economic Strategy and is an essential element in achieving a prosperous Stafford economy. We must ensure that our community has access to, and adequate provision of, high value added employment opportunities. This can best be achieved through the promotion of a high quality business environment within Stafford Borough.

We can best do this by tapping into our latent economic strengths, and build upon these to promote the ethos of sustainable business development in Stafford.

1-A: Positioning

Work is currently being undertaken to identify the key areas of business growth opportunity both at a local level (through the Stafford SRB6 mid-term evaluation) and sub-regional level (South Staffs Partnership Economic Futures Study), both for new businesses and indigenous businesses. Regionally, the cluster development agenda drives the business diversification and modernisation, and this “Strategy for Prosperity” embraces the opportunity presented by this approach. As a part of this work we will need to understand the skill and knowledge capabilities of our residual and catchment workforce. This element will be informed by the studies highlighted above and will be supplemented by further work undertaken by Stafford Borough Council.

In the first instance (and pending the results of these local studies), we will support, as a priority;

- **Public and Professional Services (existing – regional and local cluster):** Stafford will retain and enhance its position as the administrative focus of Staffordshire and the North Midlands.
- **Information & Communication Technology (developing – regional cluster):** Stafford will seek to capitalise upon its strong ICT business base, primarily through its support to the Stafford SRB6 programme and Staffordshire University.
- **Manufacturing Services (existing – local cluster):** Stafford will continue to support its traditional core of manufacturing employers. Through the provision of support services and leveraging in external business support we will continue to strive for the retention and growth of these indigenous businesses in what is an increasingly competitive global environment.
- **Environmental Technologies (new – regional cluster):** We will fully participate in supporting the development of this cluster, emerging as a key focus of activity within Southern Staffordshire.
- **Creative Industries (links to ICT) (new – regional and local cluster):** Stafford will continue to support the development of a creatives micro-cluster, not only within the boundaries of the Borough but eventually extending to promote county-wide participation.

- **Tourism (developing – regional cluster):** Stafford will continue participate at the “Staffordshire level”, and enhance its local visitor “offer”, primarily through the realisation of the Great British Kitchen and Trentham Gardens developments, and the promotion of the existing offer.

Definitions (as developed by Advantage West Midlands) for the above are included in Appendix 2 of this strategy document.

1-B: Enterprise and Growth

New business start-up and survival is the cornerstone of any aspiration to deliver a robust, sustainable local economy. In Stafford we are fortunate to enjoy the presence of numerous business support agencies. With a second business incubation facility currently being built on the Technology Park, facilities to support business start-up has never been stronger in Stafford. This support must be sustained.

We will, therefore:

- **Develop an ‘Enterprise Culture’ in Stafford**, with our intervention targeted at supporting the current business support agencies, and helping to secure and maximise their engagement and impact in Stafford.
- **Assist in securing adequate accommodation infrastructure** to support the demand for start-up and follow on business units in Stafford Borough, thereby encouraging indigenous new-starts to remain within the Borough.
- **Young Enterprise:** we will work with our partner agencies to ensure that our young community are encouraged to develop their entrepreneurial skills, equipping them to become the businesses of Stafford’s future.

1-C: Inward Investment

Stafford has a window of opportunity to exploit its many attributes and appeal to the external business community. National and international access, our local natural and built environment, lifestyle opportunities and the local and extended labour market (especially for our target business clusters) are such that we can seek to attract companies to Stafford. When coupled with indigenous growth, this range of investment will support a strong local economy in the future.

We will:

- **Promote a range of investment site opportunities** (see also 2-A below), with good access to the national transport networks and located in areas of high workforce access.
- **Continue to market Stafford** as a location for inward investment and, through our work with InStaffs (UK) Ltd, maximise our national profile. The next phase of this project will involve targeting key business development organisations (developers, agents, business intermediaries).

With respect to this ambition we will fully utilise the varied Council functions of regulatory services, the Regeneration Services team and our political influence as appropriate.

1-D: Business Support

There is a wealth of business support expertise and finance available to businesses in Stafford Borough. Access to such support is vital if our business community is to continue to grow and thrive in increasingly competitive markets. In declining sectors there may be a need for diversification support, whilst in stable sectors modernisation of processes may give our companies an additional competitive advantage. Whatever the support requirements of our businesses, their potential can only be released if access to these opportunities is achieved.

As the very nature of our key business support partners is under close scrutiny it is imperative that the overall level of service is maintained and enhanced. For our part, Stafford Borough Council will:

- **Continue to seek participation in national and regional economic regeneration programmes and initiatives** for the benefit of our business community in Stafford.
- **Signposting and Co-ordination:** To enhance our role in signposting businesses to the appropriate support agencies and act as a co-ordinating point for business support activity in Stafford, ensuring that our business community is fully supported in all areas.
- **Stafford Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Stafford Enterprise:** To fully support and lobby for the retention of our Stafford based local business support agencies, and ensure that the maximum amount of services possible are delivered locally.

1-E: The Visitor Economy (links back to theme 1-A)

Stafford's location results in it not only being highly accessible as a visitor destination in its own right but also means that it is an excellent base to explore the surrounding areas. Consequently we have the opportunity to attract a significant number and day and long-stay visitors to the area. The development of the visitor economy has the capacity to underpin our tourism sector and retail economy for the benefit of the wider community. At Stafford Borough we will:

- Continue to fully support the Great British Kitchen and Trentham Gardens Development proposals;
- Work with our local partners to maximise the profile of Stafford and Staffordshire as a visitor destination;
- Maintain an ongoing dialogue with Advantage West Midlands and economic development agencies to ensure that we fully exploit the business and employment opportunities that flow from an increasing tourism profile.

Theme 2: A Prosperous Environment

The West Midlands Regional Economic Strategy places great emphasis on creating the right conditions for business and economic growth. We need to ensure that we secure a high quality of appropriate infrastructure provision

that supports our aspiration of a prosperous economy. The scale and nature of such issues is such that this can only be achieved with the participation of our key partners.

Historically we have enjoyed a steady rate of economic site developed with a highly accessible transport infrastructure. It is important that we maintain and build upon these strengths whilst filling gaps identified in infrastructure provision.

2-A: Investment Sites

The current local plan has made significant moves to locating future employment sites at accessible locations adjacent to the Borough's urban areas. Many of our previously allocated sites are now nearing completion or there is a high expectation that they will reach this stage over the next two years. Stafford will continue to come under pressure to provide additional employment sites, especially due to the ongoing improvement of adjoining transport networks (A50, M6 Toll, M6 widening, West Coast Mainline improvements).

With respect to the future allocation and delivery of employment sites we will:

- Work with our sub-regional partners to **deliver a range of strategic and local employment site opportunities**, and work closely with the existing owners and Advantage West Midlands to secure the appropriate reuse of the former power station site at Meaford;
- **Ensure the provision of adequate employment sites**, primarily identified in locations highly accessible to the transport network and local labour force through the emerging Local Development Framework;
- **Proactively market our existing and emerging employment sites** in conjunction with site owners and InStaffs (UK) Ltd.

2-B: Transport Infrastructure

The provision of adequate transport networks that provide safe, convenient access is the life blood of our economy. Staffordshire County Council is the local Highway Authority and the primary provider of highway based infrastructure investment. Key objectives of the Stafford Urban Area Transport Strategy Summary (Staffordshire Local Transport Plan 2000) are to integrate transport provision with land use planning, and to use the improved transport network as a key element in stimulating a sustainable local economy.

Stafford Borough Council will:

- Seek to **secure a more inclusive partnership** with Staffordshire County Council, the Highways Agency and Network Rail, together with the major local transport service providers (Virgin Trains and Arriva Midlands North) to deliver continuous investment in, and improvement of, the local and national transport network as it affects Stafford Borough;
- **Continue to use its planning powers** (especially through the measured use of Section 106 agreements) to secure investment in,

and improvement of the local highway network, and help to achieve the objectives of the Staffordshire Local Transport Plan.

2-C: Housing Requirements

Housing provision and demand, house values and general housing condition are a good indicator of the general buoyancy of the local economy. The provision and availability of a range of housing opportunities within a locality is becoming increasingly important in the decision making process undertaken by prospective inward investors. Indeed, a key factor in Stafford's investment marketing programme is its lifestyle attributes. Further, the provision of a range of affordable housing options is critical in attracting and retaining key personnel to the area. Within this context social housing has an important role to play and social housing stock could now be marketed to a much wider audience than it has been traditionally.

To support the local housing market Stafford Borough Council will:

- **Promote housing provision**, including affordable housing through the LDF process in locations that give excellent accessibility to services and employment opportunities;
- **Implement its housing options appraisal decision** and endeavour to secure a future provision of the service that maximises our ability to meet our obligation under the Decent Homes Standard, and achieve wider tenants' housing aspirations and meet the community's housing needs.

2-D: The Rural Dimension

The rural economy has gone through, and not yet recovered from, probably its most turbulent (enforced) structural change ever. BSE, Foot and Mouth and the general economic slowdown have put an enormous strain on the countryside, and especially those who earn a living from it. Key to securing a stable future for rural life is its ability to adapt to a new operating environment, probably primarily through rationalisation and diversification of the rural economy. With its large rural community, Stafford Borough Council must take a prime role within any partnership seeking to secure local rural recovery. Further, we must use our services to more effectively support the recovery and development of the rural economy.

We will therefore:

- **Embrace the emerging Rural Planning Policy Statement (PPS7)** to promote the diversification of the rural business environment;
- Use our influence on structural economic regeneration programmes to **provide financial and operational support** to secure investment and diversification;
- **Secure access to basic services** in all areas of the Borough (see also 3-B below).

2-E: The Town Centres of Stafford and Stone

The town centres of Stafford and Stone provide a focus for many activities provided within the Borough and can be considered as being the heart of our community. They are important business bases, provide the majority of the

Borough's retail opportunities and provide a high quality environment which can be considered visitor attractions in their own right. However, the same can be said of many competing urban centres in the surrounding areas. To retain and improve the offer of Stafford and Stone continuous investment and improvement is required.

The draft Regional Planning Guidance for the West Midlands (RPG 11) identifies Stafford as being a strategic centre within the West Midlands, which should therefore be the focus for major retail, leisure and office developments. The development of the Stafford Town Centre Vision is fully consistent with the requirements of the draft RPG11.

Stone's recent attraction of Market Town's initiative funding from Advantage West Midlands consolidates its role as a support centre for its rural hinterland. Our aspirations for the development of each urban centre must centre on developing them within the context of RPG11, and in the case of Stafford, must reflect our ambition of retaining it as the administrative focus of Staffordshire and the North Midlands.

To promote the continued renaissance of Stafford and Stone we will:

- **Deliver the comprehensive redevelopment** of the South Eastern quadrant of Stafford town centre;
- Remain committed to delivering the **Stafford Town Centre Vision**;
- **Develop Stone's role as a thriving Market Town**, primarily through our involvement with the Stone Market Towns Initiative Partnership, in accordance with the draft RGP11's policy on Market Towns (RR3).

Theme 3: Accessing Prosperity

Access to prosperity for all of our citizens remains an imperative. Social exclusion, and in this instance economic exclusion, are manifest in Stafford where pockets of deprivation and isolation from basic services are readily identifiable (Woodseaves, Milwich, Church Eaton and Beaconside are amongst the most deprived 10% of wards nationally with respect to geographical access to services – only two other wards of a similar status are identified in Southern Staffordshire).

Overcoming exclusion of any form and providing an equality of opportunity for all of our community is a key factor in the provision of a truly prosperous Borough.

3-A: Prosperity for all

There is a need to ensure that all residents are able to maximise their income. Whether this is achieved through the provision of a wider range of employment opportunities or other sources is irrelevant in this context. As promoting business relocation and indigenous business growth in Stafford has been dealt with in strategic theme one, this section will focus on other mechanisms of accessing finance that Stafford Borough Council is involved in.

In the introduction to this section reference was made to the pockets of deprivation and need that exist in Stafford. This situation must be addressed

as a priority if we are to produce and deliver an inclusive strategy for prosperity.

We will therefore:

- Proactively **encourage the take up of Housing and Council Tax benefits** and other Council payments programmes throughout the Borough, targeting specifically those geographical areas and recipient groups in most need;
- **Maintain the levels of financial advice** provided through our Housing advice service, maintaining an appropriate level of support to the Stafford and Stone Citizens Advice Bureau;
- **Target the provision of support to voluntary and community organisations** that actively promote prosperity within the Borough through the Council's Community Grants programme.

Stafford Borough Council's Financial Strategy highlights the impact that prudent financial management can have on the provision of services. Indeed, good financial management is a key mechanism in driving forward service improvements. Stafford Borough Council is committed to the efficient, effective use of its resources, and through careful management we will seek to maximise the level of services that we provide, targeted in the first instance at our core services and priority aims. Through this work, as defined in the Financial Strategy Action Plan, we can further contribute to improving the prosperity of both our Council and the community we serve.

3-B: Connecting Stafford & Access to Opportunity and Services

ICT provision throughout the Borough will be the key mechanism for maximising access to service and opportunity in the future. Key initiatives such as Broadband roll-out and e-government provision will be central to achieving this.

Reference has previously been made to the levels of isolation from services evident in certain areas of the Borough. Closure of village shops and Post Offices and poor public transport provision all contribute, in part, to this isolation.

Stafford Borough Council must use every opportunity to facilitate improvements to ICT and access to services to its residents. Specifically, we will:

- Use the planning mechanism and regeneration processes (such as the Countryside Agency's Vital Villages) to **facilitate the provision of basic services in rural areas**;
- Fully **achieve the requirements of the e-government initiative** and promote remote access to services;
- **Fully participate in and support the Staffordshire Broadband roll-out partnership**, to lobby for the delivery of Broadband services in all areas of the Borough, but focussing on the rural areas and areas with a large concentrations of employment businesses.

Looking Forward from the Strategic Themes

This section has highlighted a diverse range of themes that, when transformed into focused actions, will delivery a prosperous Stafford. These themes have been developed with the intention of being challenging yet deliverable over a period of time. They will deliver sustainable improvements and will achieve the Council's overall vision of **“ensuring that throughout the Borough its communities and citizens have and maintain the best available prospects for prosperity”**.

The Action Plan is contained in the following section.

DEVELOPING ACTIONS

The previous section established the three strategic themes that define how we will improve the general levels of prosperity. The actions defined in this section have been developed from these themes and the Action Plan is presented in a manner that mirrors the strategic themes.

Action Area 1: Prosperity through Business Investment						
Links to priorities and strategies	Action	Benefits / Target	Cost / Resource / Partners / Risk	Delivery Date / Lead / Priority	Performance Measure	Customer Outcome
Council Aim P1/P6/P9 Strategy Theme 1-A Community Plan AWM Agenda for Action Southern Staffordshire Now	Define and support key employment clusters in Stafford	Indigenous businesses & Inward investors	No cost Regeneration Services SRB Board Market Town Board AWM cluster development South Staffs Partnership Business Link	Define clusters: - April 2004 after completion of SRB mid-term evaluation and SSP futures study. - Ongoing support cluster development thereafter	- Jobs created - Jobs safeguarded - New business start-up - Number of people receiving training and qualifications	Diversification opportunities to our companies.
Council Aim P1/P6/P9 Strategy Theme 1-A	Retain Stafford as a centre for sub-regional government	Public sector employers Stafford employment catchment	No cost Stafford BC Staffordshire CC	Ongoing response to Regional Government debate	- Jobs safeguarded in Stafford	Retention of key employment sector in Stafford
Council Aim P6 Strategy Theme 1-B Regional Economic Strategy SRB delivery plan	Develop managed workspace facility in Stafford Supplementary action – explore links with Culturegen project	First and second stage businesses in Stafford	SBC = £100k SRB Board AWM Stafford BC Stafford Enterprise	- Decision to commence by March 2004 - Completion by autumn 2005	- Jobs created - Business start-up	Increased business support in Stafford
Council Aim P3 Strategy Theme 1-C / 2-A Community Plan Local Development Framework	Provision of adequate employment sites in Stafford	Indigenous businesses (growth) and external businesses (inward investment) + local workforce	No cost Stafford BC Land and development partners	- Employment land proposals published autumn 2004 for consultation - Plan adopted January 2006	- Provision of employment land	- Investment opportunities for new employers and growth opportunities for indigenous businesses

Council Aim P2/P4 Strategy Theme 1-C SRB delivery plan AWM delivery plan	Continuation of Marketing Stafford Project (Inward Investment Officer) Supplementary actions – - Develop Borough brand supported by corporate marketing and promotions plan - Fast track planning app's	Indigenous businesses (growth) and external businesses (inward investment) + local workforce	£ 50,000 from 2006 / 07 onwards Stafford BC InStaffs - Reserve action – increased marketing budgets (£10,000 pa) for investment, tourism and events	- Funding available until March 2006 - Follow on funding required April 2006 onwards - April 2004 - December 2003	- Jobs created - Employment land developed - BV106 Number of businesses advised - BV 109	Business opportunities developed in Stafford
Council Aim P1/P6/P9 Strategy Theme 1-D AWM delivery plan	Co-ordination of business support available in Stafford Supplementary action - Reintroduce Stafford Economic Forum, supported by focus group of businesses and business support agencies	Business community in Stafford	No cost Stafford BC Business Link Stafford Chamber Learning & Skills Council Stafford Enterprise	- Stafford Business support agencies Forum established by April 2004 - April 2004	- Businesses assisted	Co-ordinated point of contact for business support opportunities
Council Aim P5/P6/P9 Strategy Theme 1-A/E Community Plan NSP Strategy	Delivery of Great British Kitchen Supplementary action - Tourism develop't officer (Tourism Bureau) to fully exploit GBK & Trentham Gardens visitor & business opportunities	Food and Drink and Tourism related businesses in Stafford, Town centre businesses Local employment opportunity	£30k pa 2004 / 05 to 2006 / 07 (3 year) Stafford BC AWM St. Modwen Developments British Food Heritage	- Decision to commence by Spring 2004 - Completion Summer 2006 - Tourism develop't officer starting April 2004 but linked to GBK approval	- Jobs created - Visitor numbers - BV119	Development of Food and Drink cluster in Stafford Major employment opportunity

Action Area 2: A Prosperous Environment						
Links to priorities and strategies	Action	Benefits / Target	Cost / Resource / Partners / Risk	Delivery Date / Lead / Priority	Performance Measure	Customer Outcome
Council Aim P3/P9 Strategy Theme 2-A Community Plan NSP Strategy	Regeneration of former power station site at Meaford	Indigenous businesses (growth) and external businesses (inward investment) + local workforce	No cost Stafford BC NSP AWM Site Administrators Development Partner	- March 2009	- Area of Brownfield land redeveloped - BV106 - %	- Investment opportunities for employers entering Stafford and growth opportunities for indigenous businesses
Council Aim P9 Strategy Theme 2-B Staffordshire LTP	Maintain transport investment in Stafford - Development of UTC - Redevelopment of Stafford station - Implementation of community traffic project in Stafford	Business community	No cost Staffordshire County Council Virgin Rail Network Rail Stafford BC (planning)	- Ongoing - Attract section 106 contributions (ongoing)	- Total investment in transport network	- Improved transport environment in Stafford - Improved access to Stafford
Council Aim P1/P8 Strategy Theme 2-D / 1-D Rural Economic Forum Action Plan	Develop proposal of rural business support officer in Stafford Borough	Rural businesses	£ 10,000 from 2004 / 05 onwards (ongoing) Stafford BC Business Link SRB Board Market Towns Board	- Feasibility & Need established by April 2004 - Implement summer 2004	- Businesses assisted - Increased access to business support finance	- Improve access to business support for rural employers

Council Aim P5/P7 Strategy Theme 2-E / 1-A Community Plan	Secure the redevelopment of the south eastern quadrant of Stafford town centre (Riverside and Tipping Street)	Local workforce Stafford BC Staffordshire CC	Cost / income to be determined Stafford BC Staffordshire County Council	- Feasibility by March 2004 - Detailed plan and agreements by October 2004 - Completion by March 2006	- Area of Brownfield land redeveloped - BV106 - % of employment land developed	- Investment opportunities in Stafford - Improved town centre environment
Council Aim P7 Strategy Theme 2-E / 2-B Community Plan Town Centre Vision Council Aim P5/P7/P8	Delivery of Town Centre Vision proposals Supplementary action - facilitate increased retail diversification & investment in Stafford and Stone - Reintroduce Town Centre Forum	Town centre organisations, visitors	£30k pa included in the "management of open spaces" action plan. Opportunity to develop "Gateway" developments at entry to town. Stafford BC Staffordshire CC	March 2007 - Ongoing - February 2004	-	- Improved town centre environment
Council Aim P2/P10 Strategy Theme 2-C Community Plan Housing Strategy Affordable Warmth Strategy	Ensure decent, appropriate housing which is energy efficient and meets the need of the community	Stafford Community	Stafford BC Registered social landlords Energy agencies	Ongoing	Decent Homes Standard Reduce energy consumption across all houses by 30% in 10 years BV62 / 63 / 64 / 74 / 180/ 184	- Improved standard of living for residents

Action Area 3: Accessing Prosperity						
Links to priorities and strategies	Action	Benefits / Target	Cost / Resource / Partners / Risk	Delivery Date / Lead / Priority	Performance Measure	Customer Outcome
Council Aim P10 Strategy Theme 3-A Community Plan Benefits Policy	Encourage take-up of Housing and Council Tax benefits	Entitled Benefits recipients	No cost at present Stafford BC DWP	Ongoing	Increased take up of benefits BV76/78(a,b,c)/79(a,b)	Improved prosperity throughout the community
Council Aim P10 Strategy Theme 3-A Community Plan	Continuation of support for Stafford and Stone CAB	Stafford Borough residents	Existing support Stafford BC	Ongoing	Number of recipients receiving financial advice – annual increase Service level agreement to be developed	Improved access to finance within the community
Council Aim P6/P8/P10 Strategy Theme 3-B Community Plan	Improve the access to basic services in rural areas	Rural residents	Cost to be developed Stafford BC (planning, regeneration, technology)	Ongoing	- Reduced isolation from services	Improved access to services for the community
Council Aim P10 Strategy Theme 3-B	Achieve e-governance requirements	All residents	Cost to be developed Stafford BC Staffordshire CC	- Project manager appointed by April 2004 - Implementation by June 2005	- All services available via the internet - BV157	Improved access to services for the community
Council Aim P10 Strategy Theme 3-B Regional Economic Strategy	Promote Broadband roll-out throughout Stafford Borough	All residents and businesses	No cost Stafford BC Staffordshire CC AWM Telecommunications providers	June 2005	- Target area priorities being employment areas, rural communities, urban areas - Target Communications providers to set trigger points for localised Broadband roll out	Improved access to services for the community

FUNDING THE ACTION PLAN

The previous section highlighted a series of priority actions that need to be implemented if we are to achieve our vision of a prosperous Stafford. Many are the continuation or extension of existing, ongoing projects, whilst others are new actions.

Some new actions, such as facilitating increased retail diversification & investment in Stafford and Stone will be delivered through the adjustment of existing operational activities and therefore have no additional budget implications. Others will require additional financial investment if they are to be developed (these have been highlighted in the action plan).

The table presented below highlights the additional investment required to deliver the projects contained within the action plan.

Project	Budget Requirement	Schedule of activity	Notes
Development of managed workspace facility in Stafford	£100,000	2004/05 & 2005/06 (2 year)	Capital contribution (full cost estimate approx. = £1.5m)
Continuation of Marketing Stafford Project (Inward Investment Officer)	£ 50,000	2006 / 07 onwards (ongoing)	Inward Investment officer + promotional budget
Tourism develop't officer (Tourism Bureau) to fully exploit visitor & business opportunities	£ 30,000	2004 / 05 to 2006 / 07 (3 year)	Revenue requirement
Develop proposal of rural business support officer in Stafford Borough	£ 20,000	2004 / 05 onwards (ongoing)	Top up of existing post

Reserve Action			
Marketing Budget / developing the Stafford brand	£10,000	2004 / 05 onwards (ongoing)	Revenue requirement for investment, tourism and events activities

Budget (reserve project not included)	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Capital	£50,000	£50,000	-	-
Revenue	£50,000	£50,000	£100,000	£100,000
Total	£100,000	£100,000	£100,000	£100,000

MONITORING AND REVIEW

In accordance with the Business Planning and Reporting Framework agreed by the Council, performance against the Action Plan will be outlined in the Annual Report to Council each Summer.

In respect of identifying criteria for a particular year details will be contained in the Annual Plan which will be reported to Council each Spring.

The Action Plan makes reference to Best Value Performance Indicators that are applicable in this instance. Progress on these Indicators is reported via the appropriate Scrutiny Committees to members of the authority on a quarterly basis.

Where an action / project is undertaken in conjunction with a partner the monitoring is also undertaken in the appropriate forum of the appropriate external partnership.

APPENDIX 1 – UNDERPINNING POLICY DOCUMENTS

The following documents have been considered and have influenced the development of the Strategy for Prosperity:

Stafford Documents

- The Council's Aims – 2003 / 2007
- Stafford Borough Community Plan 2003 06
- Stafford Borough Council Financial Strategy
- SBC Concessions Strategy
- SBC Housing Business Plan
- Stafford IEG statement
- SBC Encouraging take-up of housing and council tax benefits
- SBC Discretionary Housing Payments Policy
- SBC Housing Strategy
- SBC LA21 strategy
- SBC Homelessness Strategy
- SBC Housing Renewal Policy
- Stafford Borough Local Cultural Strategy
- SBC Asset Management Plan
- Local Development Framework (draft) Core Strategy
- Stafford – making a difference in North Staffordshire (Bid for SRB funding, 2000)
- Stafford SRB6: Project development – a focus for Stafford SRB6
- Strategy for tourism in Stafford Borough (1999 – 2002)
- SBC Economic Development and Regeneration Action Plan – 2001/3
- SBC Policy Framework – 1999 to 2002
- SBC Risk Management Strategy
- SBC Discretionary Rate Relief
- SBC Community Grants Framework
- Stafford Town Centre Vision
- Stafford Borough Local Plan 2001

Sub-Regional Documents

- Southern Staffordshire Now
- Forward, Together. North Staffs
- Business Link Staffordshire Delivery Plan 2003/4
- Staffordshire County Council Economic Regeneration Forward Programme
- InStaffs (UK) Ltd annual review 2002/3
- Staffordshire Local Transport Plan 2000/05
- Learning and Skills Council for Staffordshire – Stafford Borough Priorities for Action
- Staffordshire Economic Review 2002

Regional Documents

- West Midlands Economic Strategy

- Advantage West Midlands “Delivering the Advantage” – 2003/06 Corporate Plan
- The Countryside Agency Vital Villages Programme
- Draft Regional Planning Guidance (RGP) 11 – September 2003

APPENDIX 2 – AWM DEFINITION OF KEY BUSINESS CLUSTERS

Clusters are not simple industry sectors but are defined as:

“Geographic concentrations of interconnected companies, specialised suppliers, services providers, firms in related industries, training institutions and support organisations linked around a technology or end product within a local area or region”

Environmental Technologies (Regional cluster) - The sub-sectors of the environmental industry as defined by the Government’s Joint Environmental Markets Unit (JEMU) are:

- Air pollution control.
- Waste management and recycling.
- Water and wastewater treatment.
- Contaminated land remediation.
- Environmental consulting services.
- Environmental monitoring & instrumentation.
- Marine pollution control.
- Noise and vibration control.
- Landscape industries.
- Energy management and low carbon technologies.
- Renewable energy.
- Cleaner technologies and processes.

Professional Services (Regional cluster) - The Advantage West Midlands mapping exercise of professional service firms identified the following sectors:

- Banking and financial services.
- Insurance and pension services.
- Accountancy.
- Consultancy.
- Computer services.
- Design related services.
- Marketing services.
- Legal services.
- Property services.

Locally, the addition of **Public Sector** as a local cluster reflects the strong public sector presence in Stafford and the support businesses that are identifiable locally. In this instance public sector refers to:

- Local government.
- Regional and National government departments.
- Regional and National government agencies.
- Emergency services.
- Health services.
- Judicial Services.

Information and Communication Technology (Regional cluster) – sectors identified include:

- Electronics.
- Computer hardware.
- Telecommunications.
- Computer services.
- Software consultancy and supply.
- Data processing.
- Other computer related activities.

Creative Industries (Local Cluster) – although not a specific regional cluster can be seen to be included within the following sectors

- ICT cluster definition (see above).
- Media cluster, which itself embraces film; TV; radio; new media and interactive software and games.
- High Value Added Consumer Products Cluster which includes ceramics, jewellery, leather, glass and designer and crafts makers

Locally, the Culturegen project seeks to support business development within the creative industry sectors.