

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Development Plan and its Purpose

1.1.1 The Development Plan for Stafford Borough consists of the Staffordshire Structure Plan 1986-2001 approved by the Secretary of State for the Environment, together with this Plan prepared and adopted by the Borough Council. The Development Plan may also include Local Plans prepared and adopted by the County Council on particular subjects such as Minerals and Waste Disposal.

1.1.2 The Staffordshire Structure Plan takes note of the Strategic Planning Guidance for the West Midlands published by the Department of the Environment and sets out the broad framework for planning in the County. It includes general planning policies and lays down the scale and general location of future development.

1.1.3 The Borough Council has previously prepared and adopted Local Plans for various parts of the Borough, but this Plan has been drawn up to cover the whole of the Borough in accordance with legislation making District Wide Local Plans a statutory requirement.

1.1.4 The purpose of this Local Plan is:-

- (a) To develop the policies and general proposals of the Staffordshire Structure Plan 1986-2001 and to relate them to precise areas of land.
- (b) To provide a detailed basis for the control of development through planning applications.
- (c) To provide a detailed basis for co-ordinating the development or other use of land.
- (d) To bring environmental and ecological issues in to the future planning of the area.
- (e) To ensure that development and growth are sustainable so that present and future generations are not denied the best of today's environment.
- (f) To help manage demand for and improve efficiency in the use of resources[and to take account of the accessibility of land uses].
- (g) To reduce the need to travel particularly by private car.
- (h) To bring local and detailed planning issues before the public.

General Description of the Borough

- 1.1.5 Stafford Borough is centrally placed within Staffordshire and abuts all other Staffordshire districts. The Borough has an area of some 230 square miles, with a population of around 120,000. Stafford with a population of approximately 60,000 is the main town, and is located at the southern edge of the Borough. Stone located some 6 miles to the north of Stafford, is the second largest settlement with a population of 12,000, and lies within the valley of the river Trent. The majority of the Borough's area however is rural in character, with a range of settlements varying from suburban areas on the fringes of the Potteries conurbation, to large free-standing villages and more isolated small settlements.
- 1.1.6 To north of the Borough stand the urban areas of Stoke on Trent and Newcastle under Lyme, to the south are the fringes of the West Midlands Metropolitan area, to the west of the Borough are rural parts of Shropshire and to the east, rural areas of East Staffordshire.
- 1.1.7 The M6 Motorway runs through the Borough in a north-south direction. Junction 14 and the Junction 13, which is just south of the Borough boundary, adjoin the Stafford town area, while Junction 15 provides access to the northernmost parts of the Borough's area.
- 1.1.8 The West Coast main Inter-City Line runs through the Borough with an inter-city station at Stafford, from where the line splits to provide main line services to the to London Euston or via Birmingham to the south west of England. In a northerly direction, the services run to Manchester, Liverpool and Scotland.
- 1.1.9 Many parts of Stafford Borough are visually attractive. The accessible countryside, such as the Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Hanchurch Hills and other areas, together with a variety of attractive villages, historic houses and country estates, including Shugborough, contribute to the attractiveness, whilst making the area vulnerable to pressures for development, which, if not carefully controlled, could harm the existing attractiveness of the area.
- 1.1.10 Stafford Borough has to respond to the pressure for change however. Increased numbers of families and a marked growth in the number of single person households, generates needs for new houses. New employment opportunities will be needed to meet demand, widen choice and replace those lost. New leisure opportunities, social facilities and shopping opportunities will be demanded to meet higher expectations. Problems of congestion and accessibility need to be taken into account. These needs have to be recognised and catered for in way which respects and conserves the best of the Borough's heritage, whilst taking opportunities for improvement of less attractive areas.

1.1.11 It will not be possible to please everyone in shaping the future of Stafford Borough through the Local Plan but the Council, in reaching its decisions, has tried to balance the needs for new development, strengthening the local economy and retaining the best of the existing features of the Borough.

The General Aims of the Plan

1.1.12 The overall aim of the plan is to make provision for the levels of development established in the Staffordshire Structure Plan and to balance the need for development with the protection and enhancement of the environment.

1.1.13 As part of its "Sustainable Development Strategy" Government advice and policy is that Local Plans should assist in reducing the "need to travel" and "greenhouse gas emissions". Policies and proposals in this Plan, particularly those which relate to providing for development in Stafford, Stone and selected settlements or which restrict inappropriate development in the open countryside are in keeping with this approach.

1.1.14 Development will be accommodated in order to:-

- provide for a range of housing and employment opportunities through the identification of land for development;
- ensure the growth and diversification of the economy of the area;
- improve town and local centres in terms of the quality of their appearance and the range of facilities provided;
- ensure that an appropriate level of infrastructure is provided to meet the needs of new development;
- encourage access throughout the Borough for everyone including wheelchair users and people with physical or sensory disabilities, elderly people, and those with toddlers or infants in pushchairs and ensure that appropriate provision is made for the needs of these people in all developments.

Everyone includes people with physical disabilities such as people who lack stamina, have poor co-ordination or poor grip; people who use mobility aids such as wheelchair users, stick and crutch users; people with sensory impairments such as partially sighted and blind people and people who are hard of hearing or deaf.

- maintain and improve accessibility.

1.1.15 The protection and enhancement of the environment will aim to:-

- protect, conserve and enhance the Green Belt and the open countryside including the Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding

Natural Beauty from undesirable and incongruous forms of development;

- protect and enhance features and sites of nature conservation value;
- protect, conserve and enhance the architectural, historic and other qualities of the built environment;
- improve, conserve and enhance the physical environment and amenity of the Borough;

More specific aims are included in the relevant section of the Plan. Detailed policies contained within the Plan, either taken alone or in combination with other policies, seek to achieve these aims.

Development Strategy

- 1.1.16 This Plan is required to allocate land for new development in accordance with the provisions of the Structure Plan. The Structure Plan gives a county-wide framework of policies and sets overall requirements for an additional 9,100 new homes to be provided in the Borough, during the period 1986-2001, with an additional 125 hectares of land for employment purposes to be identified in the Local Plan. The Secretary of State, in reaching these requirements, included an element to provide new homes to relieve development pressures in Southern Staffordshire and the West Midlands Conurbation.
- 1.1.17 The Borough Council in considering its overall strategy, took into account environmental considerations, advice of Central Government, the views of local residents and organisations together with the particular characteristics of the Borough and its constituent parts.
- 1.1.18 Central Government advice and the Structure Plan both promote the use and re-use of urban sites as means of reducing development pressures on the countryside and greenfield sites. This approach has been applied and opportunities taken to secure the reuse of existing or anticipated vacant or redundant land in both urban and rural areas.
- 1.1.19 Within settlements a principal issue has concerned the balance between the protection of undeveloped space, which may be important for any number of reasons, against the general planning policy that seeks to direct development toward existing settlements.
- 1.1.20 The development strategy for Stafford Borough focuses on two main principles:-
- (a) the urban centres of Stafford and Stone, but more particularly the former, are to be the main focuses for development. This strategy is based upon the following factors:-

- (i) infrastructure such as roads, water supplies, sewerage and sewage treatment facilities already exist.
 - (ii) education, health, social, recreational and cultural facilities are present, together with shopping and employment opportunities.
 - (iii) public transport is more readily available and facilities are available which are accessible by foot or bicycle.
- (b) in the rural areas, the prime objectives in determining the location of development, are to reduce the need to travel especially by car, to avoid sporadic housing development in the open countryside, and to promote appropriate development in existing communities which can help sustain local services and employment.

1.1.21 New settlements have been considered as an alternative strategy and a number of options put forward by representees have been examined. This approach has been rejected since it would not provide for the level of provision, range and variety of sites in the locations where demand and need are evident. New or expanded settlements would not be of such a scale as to ensure economic provision of necessary social, transport, educational and infrastructure facilities and would have an adverse effect on overall settlement patterns and the countryside.

Selected Settlements and Residential Development Boundaries

1.1.22 The primary purpose of selecting settlements is to identify those settlements around which it would be appropriate to define a Residential Development Boundary (RDB). The Residential Development Boundary has a number of functions, but firstly it identifies those areas which in development control terms are not regarded as being in the open countryside. A second key purpose of the RDB is to assist in implementing the Plan's development strategy. Accordingly the RDBs are drawn tightly around rural settlements. This reflects the approach of focusing major new residential development on Stafford and Stone, and particularly on Stafford.

1.1.23 While it is clear that Stafford and Stone are appropriate for settlement selection and RDB definition it is often less clear with rural settlements. A selection methodology was therefore adopted to assist in this process.

1.1.24 A number of interrelated factors have been used as the basis for the selection of the settlements. These can be summarised as:-

- (i) the availability of services/facilities
- (ii) the population size of the settlement
- (iii) the character and form of the settlement as expressed by the number of dwellings

1.1.25 The most common criterion used to select a particular settlement is the existence of services/facilities. The intention is to minimise the cost of public service provision and at the same time improve the overall level of public accessibility to different services and facilities by ensuring that any new residential development, no matter how limited, will be located close to them and assist in relaxing the need to travel. Settlements with three or more of the defined services/facilities listed below were considered to be suitable candidates.

1. Medical facility i.e. surgery, chemist or dentist;
2. Shop outlet i.e. food or general or non food;
3. Educational facility i.e. nursery unit or first/primary school or secondary school;
4. Post Office;
5. Public transport i.e. bus available for journey to work; bus available for evening travel; or bus available for shopping;
6. Village Hall;
7. Church/chapel.

1.1.26 A second criterion used in the selection of settlements is the population size of the settlement. Assessing population size provides some indication of the scale of locally generated need or demand that could reasonably be anticipated. For the purpose of selecting settlements, it was considered that settlements with populations of greater than 250 would also be suitable candidates for selection.

1.1.27 A third factor, the number of dwellings in a settlement, is also related to population size and availability of services as well as giving an indication of the character of the settlement. Settlements with a very low number of dwellings have generally a dispersed character. Dispersed settlements are considered to be inappropriate for the location of new development as such development would tend to be in such locations only residential development related to and necessary for, agricultural or forestry needs would be acceptable if it could not be located in a selected settlement. Other types of residential development would be in conflict with national planning policy and not assist in achieving objectives such as reducing the need to travel detrimental to the appearance and character of the open countryside. It was considered that only settlements with more than 50 dwellings would be suitable candidates for selection.

1.1.28 In addition to the specific criteria detailed above, a number of other factors have been important influences in the selection of the settlements. The following two issues are of particular significance:-

- (i) Infrastructure Issues - There can be scope for further developments as a means of achieving needed infrastructure improvements, or alternatively, infrastructure constraints could effectively limit the development possible in a particular settlement.
- (ii) Character Issues - These revolve around the ability of a settlement to accommodate further development without damage to its character. Important factors include designations such as conservation areas/listed buildings, but will also relate to the wider policy context of a settlement such as whether it is within a Green Belt, or is in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or Special Landscape Area.

1.1.29 An explanation of the application of the settlement selection process to the settlements included in the Plan is set out in Chapter 3, Housing.

Recognised Industrial Estates

1.1.30 The development Strategy Plan applies equally to industrial or employment development as it does to residential development. The majority of employment uses are concentrated in or adjacent to Stafford and Stone. There are, however, for historic reasons a number of significant rural employment concentrations. These are identified in the Plan as Recognised Industrial Estates (RIE's) and the precise extent of these areas has been defined by a boundary line.

1.1.31 The Borough Council considers that the expansion of the RIE's would, given the rural location be contrary to the Plan Strategy which is based on national planning policy advice. At the same time, it is recognised that the employers within these areas may make an important contribution to the local rural economy and by providing jobs for local people help to an extent in reducing rural to urban commuting. The approach taken in the Plan has been to seek to define the boundaries of the RIE's to allow 'within curtilage' development only provided that the curtilage area does not include presently open countryside. In this way the function and purpose of the RIE's reflects and helps to implement the Plan's overall development strategy.

Implementation

1.1.32 If the policies and proposals of the Plan are to be achieved, it will require a partnership between the Borough Council, other public sector bodies and the private sector. It is unrealistic to expect that resources available to the Borough Council or County Council (or their successor authorities) will increase significantly within the plan period. Within this framework the Authority will continue to act as a co-ordinator and enabler, with a heavy reliance on the private sector which is, itself, influenced by short and medium term shifts in the economy.

- 1.1.33 The Plan tries to identify opportunities for development and seeks to ensure that development also provides a gain to the broader community (for example the provision of social housing or public open space).
- 1.1.34 The Borough Council will enter into appropriate planning agreements where necessary, to ensure successful implementation of development proposals. Matters to be included in such agreements, could include off-site highway and drainage works, the provision of car parking, open space, landscaping, children's play areas, social housing and other facilities.

The Process of Local Plan Preparation

- 1.1.35 Preparation of a Local Plan is a statutory process laid down in the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, as amended by the Planning and Compensation Act 1991. When formally adopted by the Council the Local Plan will have legal status. There will be a presumption in favour of any development proposal which is in accordance with the Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 1.1.36 The Borough Council published a Draft Plan for Public Consultation at the end of 1991 and consulted widely in early 1992. As a result of the substantial public response, the Borough Council subsequently carried out a thorough wide-ranging review of the document and radically revised the proposals (copies of the review reports are available as background to the plan if required). Further consultation on revised proposals took place in the February and March of 1993, before final decisions were taken on the policies and proposals to be included in the Deposit Plan in April 1993.
- 1.1.37 The Deposit version of the Local Plan incorporated these changes including updates and other refinements where appropriate. A Statement of Conformity to the Structure Plan was given by the County Council. The Plan was then placed on Deposit for a period of six weeks.
- 1.1.38 The Borough Council considered all the representations and objections made during the Deposit stage. A Public Local Inquiry was held in late 1994 and the first half of 1995. An Inquiry was carried out by an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for the Environment. The Inspector considered the objections to the Plan and then reported his findings to the Council with recommendations in January 1997.
- 1.1.39 The Borough Council is not obliged to accept the Inspector's recommendations, but must give reasons for not doing so. The Inspector's recommendations have led to further changes to the Plan and accordingly must be advertised with further opportunity given for comment before the Plan can be finally adopted.
- 1.1.40 When the formal adoption procedures have been completed the Local Plan will supersede all the existing Local Plans covering the Borough (except any Subject Plans prepared by the County Council).

Format of the Local Plan

- 1.1.41 The Local Plan is presented two parts. These are the Written Statement (this document) and the Proposals Map (to be found inside the rear cover). A Technical Appendix has been compiled, comprising more detailed maps and listings of designations referred to in the Policy Section e.g. Conservation areas, SSSIs.
- 1.1.42 The Written Statement is divided into chapters dealing with specific topics such as housing, employment and the environment. Within each Chapter there are topic sub-sections comprising a general introduction to each topic followed by specific policies and proposals. Proposals are also enclosed in a text box. Each Policy or Proposal is given a unique reference and is set out in a distinctive typeface. Many of the policies apply to the whole Borough but some only relate to specific areas. In considering any development proposal more than one topic area or policy may need to be referred to.
- 1.1.43 The Proposals Map is reproduced from an Ordnance Survey base map and shows the precise areas where certain policies and individual proposals will apply. Where it is necessary to show these at a larger scale for the sake of clarity, Inset Maps and Plans are included in the Written Statement and identified on the Proposals Map with a cross-reference.

Developer Contributions and Planning Obligations

- 1.1.44 Where it is necessary and appropriate to do so the Borough Council will seek contributions from the developers of sites allocated in this plan or which otherwise come forward for development. In doing so, the following policy will apply.

POLICY INT 1 PLANNING OBLIGATIONS

"Where appropriate, planning obligations under the provisions of Section 106 of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 will be entered into. Instances where an obligation may be required would include:

- (a) Works needed to enable development to go ahead; (for example the provisions of adequate access or car parking) or the making of a contribution meeting the costs of providing such facilities in the near future.*
- (b) Works being so directly related to the proposed development and to the use of land after its completion that the development ought not to be permitted without it; for example the provision of public transport facilities, provision for cycles or car parking in or near the development, the provision of reasonable amounts of open space related to the development or to social, educational, recreational, sporting or other community provision the need for which arises from the development.*
- (c) Development necessary to secure an acceptable balance of uses or the implementation of local plan policies for a particular area or type of development for example the inclusion of an element of affordable housing in residential development.*
- (d) Action to offset the loss of or impact on any amenity or resource present on the site prior to development; for example archaeology or public access.*

Planning obligations will be entered into voluntarily and be fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the proposed development."