

STAFFORD BOROUGH LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

KEY STAKEHOLDER DISCUSSIONS

MEETING WITH PARISH COUNCILS (STAFFORD AREA)
12th FEBRUARY 2008 – 6.30pm

MINUTES OF MEETING

Attendees

Cllr W D Davis (Chair) – Ward Member for Milwich and Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration.

Mr A Yendole – Principal Planning Officer, Stafford Borough Council

Mrs N Perry – Planning Assistant, Stafford Borough Council

Mr R B Bennett – Berkswich Parish Council

Mr I Bearne – Berkswich Parish Council

Mr R Thomas – Creswell Parish Council

Mr S Dixon – Creswell Parish Council

Mr R E Lee – Colwich Parish Council

Cllr Mrs J E Tabernor – Ward Member for Haywood and Hixon

Ms A Makin – Hyde Lea Parish Council

Mr J Eaves – Hyde Lea Parish Council

Cllr L W Bloomer – Staffordshire County Council

Mr W F Mason – Hyde Lea Parish Council

Mrs C M Hammond – Brocton Parish Council

Mr James A Eld – Seighford Parish Council

Mrs M Rathbone – Seighford Parish Council

Mrs J Wetton – Seighford Parish Council

Cllr Mrs F Beatty – Ward Member for Chartley

Mrs G D Anstey – Ingestre with Tixall Parish Council

Dr A Andrews – Ingestre with Tixall Parish Council

Mr D L Jones – Hyde Lea Parish Council

Mrs C D Hassall – Hixon Parish Council

Mr J D M Price – Seighford Parish Council

Mr P Hopcroft – Hixon Parish Council

Mr D Sephton – Hixon Parish Council

Ms Jane Mitchell – Salt Parish Council

Mrs S McKeown – Hixon Parish Council

Mr B McKeown – Hixon Parish Council

Mrs Joan Moore – Brocton Parish Council

Mrs Leslie Lee – Brocton Parish Council

Cllr A H Stafford Northcote JP – Ward Member for Haywood and Hixon

Cllr F A Finlay – Ward Member for Milford

Cllr R M Sutherland – Ward Member for Seighford

Cllr A J Perkins - Ward Member for Haywood and Hixon

1. Welcome & Introduction

Cllr W D Davies introduced the document 'The Plan for Stafford Borough: Developing the Development Strategy' which would be the primary focus of the meeting.

Due to the socio-economic position of Stafford the town has been chosen, along with Burton Upon Trent, as an area of significant development in the Regional Spatial Strategy. This will mean at least 7,000 new homes for Stafford town and 3,000 houses elsewhere in the Borough, 40 hectares of readily available employment development every 5 years, as well as office and retail development at Stafford town. In terms of large developments 'pending' there are three within Stafford town at Riverside / former Tescos for mixed use scheme including dwellings, retail and leisure uses, St Georges scheme for housing, offices and hotel and Castle Wharf scheme for leisure, cinema and hotel. In addition there is the possibility of development at the rail station, in particular increasing parking provision.

Stafford Borough Council and Staffordshire County Council support Stafford's profile being promoted. However the development figures given in the Regional Spatial Strategy cannot be delivered without related infrastructure, such as schools, transport management, health etc. The Borough Council has made this clear in its responses to consultations on the Regional Spatial Strategy.

Following the draft Regional Spatial Strategy publication in January 2008 a letter from Baroness Andrew's stated that regional housing figures should increase from 365,000 to 400,000. In relative terms, this could potentially mean an additional 1,000 – 1,500 in housing figures for Stafford Borough.

The options given in the Borough wide Development Strategy are based on the requirements set out in the Regional Spatial Strategy. There are important choices within these options and it is vital for Parishes and other organizations to state their views. There are Borough wide implications from each option, in particular the Residential Development Boundaries (RDB's) of both Stafford town and the rural settlements.

Attendees should consider, in particular:

- the Parish Council response to the options
- Individual response if these differ to the Parish Council response

2. Stafford Borough Local Plan 2001 – saved policies

Mr A Yendole highlighted the policies that have not been saved from the Stafford Borough Local Plan 2001. Other Local Plan policies currently saved will be superseded by policies in the new Local Development Framework when this has been adopted.

3. LDF – Progress to date

Mr A Yendole highlighted that the Local Development Scheme was agreed in September 2007 and sets out the timetable for the Local Development Framework. In October 2007 the Council publish the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report, setting out the methodology to be used to appraise the Plan for Stafford Borough. In addition a great deal of evidence base work has been carried out which is extremely important because it underpins the new Plan for Stafford Borough and the decisions that will be made regarding future development. The Annual Monitoring Report was published in December 2007 outlining the Borough's position against national indicators. Finally the Land for New Homes is published on an annual basis and gives the number of houses 'completed' and those with planning permissions.

Cllr W D Davis stated that these permissions could be viewed as housing 'in the bank' and taken off the figure given in the Regional Spatial Strategy.

Cllr W D Davies urged Parish Councils to speak to Mr G Unwin in the Forward Planning section as he is responsible for producing the Land for New Homes document and will be able to break down figures for Parishes.

4. Implications of the Regional Plan – Submission

The West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) currently runs until 2021 but is now being revised to 2026. The start date for the RSS will be 2006 although the Regional Plan will not be adopted until 2009. The RSS provides each authority in the West Midland's region with specific figures for housing, employment, office and retail development. Previously the RSS gave an overall figure for each County which was subsequently divided to District authorities through the Structure Plan.

The RSS is currently out for consultation until 23rd May 2008. However this deadline may be extended to the end of June 2008 to allow further consideration of additional housing proposed by the Baroness Andrews letter. Government Office for the West Midlands will be carrying out additional work, using consultants, to propose where and how over 35,000 new houses can be delivered.

Mr A Yendole explained that the number of housing completions in 2006 will contribute to the housing figures in the RSS revision. There are an additional 2,000 - 3,000 houses with planning permission which could be built. However the Council needs to provide evidence to prove that the houses can be delivered. Flexibility is required as part of the development plan process to ensure certainty of delivery of houses in the correct amounts at the right place

Cllr W D Davis stated that having planning permission is not enough. Houses need to be built and counted to contribute to Borough's housing figure. The Council therefore needs to generate sufficient interest amongst developers

and land owners to build the housing. It is the developers who deliver the housing, based on market forces, not the Borough Council.

Mr R Thomas, Creswell Parish Council - How can one have confidence in the Regional Spatial Strategy system following the decision to increase the housing figures to 400,000 after the previous figures were based on 'robust' statistics and evidence from local authorities? There was a focus of development on Major Urban Areas. Has this now changed in the region?

Cllr W D Davis agreed that it is frustrating that the figures have increased but the Council will continue to insist that the level of housing cannot be achieved without appropriate infrastructure and employment development. Cllr W D Davis stated that the focus on Major Urban Areas was to stop migration to the Shire Counties but now these areas are being asked to deliver more housing.

Mr B McKeown, Hixon Parish Council – Will there be a presumption that planning permission sites will be encouraged in preference to new development sites?

Cllr W D Davis stated it is important to have phasing and implementation of sites in the Local Development Framework. There is the possibility of restricting further Greenfield sites based on the commitments but it is still important to make sure delivery takes place. There needs to be a balance between existing permissions given and new development sites, which will be discussed at a site-specific level.

Cllr F A Finlay – If 3,000 houses have permission the number of dwellings built could be 30% of the required total. What can the Council do to encourage these to come forward and be developed?

Cllr W D Davies stated that the phasing of new housing will be required to ensure that at the end of the period there isn't an oversupply of housing. It is not the Council but developers who decide whether to develop a site or not.

Mr R E Lee, Colwich Parish Council – What about 'affordable' housing as part of the overall total? What ways are there to ensure affordable housing is delivered?

Cllr W D Davis stated that the Council is considering the affordability issue specifically, in particular assessing the threshold of housing to determine when developers need to deliver affordable housing. The real difficulty is ensuring housing is affordable to those in need and that it remains affordable. Details will be considered as part of the Local Development Framework using Section 106 policy and the Housing Strategy. The Local Development Framework will also consider 'rural exception sites', the design of affordable housing, social housing and 'stair casing'. The Housing Strategy suggests that Parish Councils should carry out a housing needs survey for their area in order to have a list of those in need of affordable housing in their Parish.

Cllr F A Finlay raised the point of Housing Associations and in particular who gets access to affordable housing. People in rural areas require more information about the process and support available.

Cllr W D Davis stated that the Council will continue to work on S106 agreements dealing with a wide variety of matters to ensure development delivers including affordable housing and community facilities.

Mr P Hopcroft, Hixon Parish Council – How severe are the penalties for not delivering housing?

Cllr W D Davies stated that this is a major concern and there is the possibility that Planning Delivery Grant which helps to deliver the Council's planning service could be affected if housing completions are not delivered. This will obviously have an impact on the level of services provided by the Council in the future.

5. The Plan for Stafford Borough – approach and options

Mr A Yendole introduced the document and set the context for future development in the Borough. The Council must consider impacts on neighbouring areas and authorities, including towns such as Newport and Rugeley, the City of Stoke-on-Trent, the Green Belt, M6 motorway and the Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Cllr W D Davies emphasized that the Green Belt policy will not change, and will continue to be protected, unless National Planning Policy changes.

Mr A Yendole stated that it is important to look forward 20 years in order to draw up a vision and key objectives for the Borough, and therefore decide how and where to distribute the levels of development.

6. Key Issues for the new Development Plan

The Council called for Parishes to raise key issues which need to be addressed to ensure that the Local Development Framework delivered an effective strategy.

The Plan for Stafford Borough document is a high level strategic paper which will be refined throughout the next two stages of the process. In April / May 2008 the Council will distribute maps highlighting possible locations for development.

The point was made that the six options put forward do not accurately represent development. Mr A Yendole confirmed that the options were prepared to aid discussion.

There are implications of each option and these are considered by the Sustainability Appraisal process when choosing the appropriate Development Strategy for the Borough.

Cllr W D Davies stated that the Council has considered a 'new village' or 'eco-town' but not pursued this option. Norton Bridge has been suggested as a location for a new village, however latest guidance regarding eco-towns suggest that the housing figures would be on top of the proposed Borough housing figures in the RSS and therefore will not bring tangible benefits.

Dr A Andrews, Tixall with Ingestre Parish Council – What about infrastructure, in particular the Eastern Distributory Road, as traffic through Tixall is increasing?

Cllr W D Davies stated that this is County Council issue through the Local Transport Plan. However if 7,000 new houses are to be located at Stafford it is likely that the Eastern Distributor Road may be pursued. The cost of the road would be a problem in terms of delivery as it is unlikely that one developer would be required to fund the entire project through a Section 106 agreement. In addition there are other traffic problems in different parts of the Borough, in particular the Gnosall – Newport Road and the Colwich – Stone road. The Council and County Council will be considering appropriate traffic management, not just new roads. In addition the possibility of a park and ride scheme in Stafford is being explored.

Berkswich Parish Council stated that the Parish Council did not support the Eastern Distributor Road and that other initiatives including a Park and Ride scheme should be considered.

Cllr W D Davies encouraged Parish Councils to hold a special parish meeting in order to collate local views and respond to the consultation process.

Cllr Mrs F Beatty – The LDF must have joined up thinking and bear in mind other plans, in particular the railway / route plans – can this be taken into account?

Cllr W D Davies emphasized that the Council are aware of the proposed route changes in the rail system and will raise this as an issue in the Local Development Framework. There is the danger that if a new railway route is built Stafford may lose its position on the West Coast mainline as a rail transport hub.

Cllr Mrs J Tabernor – What about the Residential Development Boundaries and are the sewage problems in Hixon and the Haywoods area to be addressed?

Cllr W D Davies stated that Residential Development Boundaries will be considered in the next consultation stage. The Council has carried out a survey of land within every Residential Development Boundary to identify potential housing land. If Residential Development Boundaries are to be

remove for some settlements this could have an impact on the amount of housing available. Parishes should consider whether there is a proven need for new housing in the area. In reality a compromise between the two options may be appropriate where in some settlements it may be appropriate to remove Residential Development Boundaries. This decision will be decided at the next stage of the Local Development Framework taking account of specific issues.

Mr J Eaves Hyde Lea Parish Council – In terms of Hyde Lea being on the boundary of two authorities – what cross boundary work is taking place?

Cllr W D Davies explained that meetings have taken place with South Staffordshire District Council specifically regarding the issue of housing in South Staffordshire District, being used to meet Stafford's needs. There may be a direction given through the Regional Spatial Strategy. Other cross boundary issues arise with Stoke, Newcastle and Staffordshire Moorlands which will be considered through the Local Development Framework process.

Cllr R M Sutherland – There are other important factors to consider such as schools and roads.

Cllr W D Davies stated that the Council is preparing a robust evidence base and it is important to have the infrastructure in place at the time of development, not retrospectively. The Borough Council have asked for a grant from the Government to carry out further studies for transport and water infrastructure. In addition the Borough Council are working very closely with Staffordshire County Council regarding the services and facilities including future school provision.

Mrs M Rathbone, Seighford Parish Council – How can traffic level information be accessed to prove there is a problem of congestion on certain roads?

Cllr W D Davies stated that Staffordshire County Council should hold this information. The Council needs to differentiate real problems from perceived problems. A detailed study into traffic in Stafford town is currently being carried out by Atkins consultants for Stafford Borough and Staffordshire County Councils.

Mr R Thomas, Creswell Parish Council – Within the six options put forward for discussion, is the 70 / 30 split between Stafford and rest of the Borough assumed?

Cllr W D Davies stated that it is important to remember the options put forward do not simply apply to housing, but all development including employment. Employment of 40 hectares every five years could be located at existing employment areas where infrastructure exists if areas are extended.

Mr R E Lee – What about the downgrading of Accident and Emergency departments in Stafford and Burton-upon-Trent? This will have an impact, especially due to the level of development in these areas.

Cllr W D Davies stated that the Council are having discussions with the hospital, health authority and Primary Care Trust as part of the evidence base work for the Local Development Framework.

Mr J Eld, Seighford Parish Council – In terms of affordable housing and 'housing for sale', will all types of housing count in the housing figures?

Cllr W D Davies confirmed that all types of housing will be counted against the Borough's housing total. In terms of Housing Associations and deciding who goes in affordable housing, Parish Councils should prepare a local housing needs survey to establish a list of those in need. Affordability issues and policies will be included in the Local Development Framework with thresholds established for particular areas. Rural exception sites will also be considered.

Cllr A H Stafford Northcote – Why have the thoughts / rationale behind each option not been included, in particular Option E?

Cllr W D Davies emphasized that options and particular settlements have been given as examples to aid discussion. Development at settlements are not the final decision.

Mr A Yendole stated that some of the settlements listed in option E have few services and facilities.

Berkswich Parish Council stated that Option E is confusing with a focus on services and facilities.

Hopton Parish Council – if 400,000 new houses are built does this mean 800,000 extra people in the region?

Cllr W D Davis stated that some of the requirement was for elderly people and single person households.

Cllr Sutherland asked how the elderly and demographics are being considered as part of the Development Plan

Cllr W D Davis stated that retirement villages and extra care schemes are being considered through the consultation process.

7. Settlement Assessment of Services & Facilities

The purpose of this document is to establish an accurate picture for all settlements. Mr A Yendole asked for updated information or inaccurate information to be raised as decisions will be based on the level of services and facilities each settlement has got.

8. Future Evidence Gathering – Strategic Housing Land

In terms of the evidence base the Council are having discussions with different authorities and service providers regarding health, education, water etc. The Council are asking the question of how these services would be affected by development in certain locations. If development is not possible then what finance and work would be needed to improve the infrastructure. All this information will be made publicly available when completed.

The Strategic Housing Land Assessment will assess all possible areas within existing Residential Development Boundaries that would be suitable for housing development. The results will be published in April / May 2008 for discussion. This piece of work will decide the level of development that will be required on greenfield land and will also raise the question of how much development within Residential Development Boundaries?

Dr A Andrews, Ingestre with Tixall Parish Council - What about gas and electricity providers?

Mr A Yendole replied that the Council are trying to actively engage the gas and electricity providers as part of the evidence base for the Local Development Framework but have had no meetings as yet.

Dr A Andrews, Ingestre with Tixall Parish Council – Tixall and Ingestre are not within the settlement assessment?

Mr A Yendole stated that the settlements surveyed within the assessment have Residential Development Boundaries. However smaller settlements can be included if there are services and facilities highlighted by Parishes.

Mr B McKeown, Hixon Parish Council - What documents do the Council want comments on?

Cllr W D Davies – Both the Plan for Stafford Borough document and the Settlement Assessment of services and facilities.

Mrs N Perry introduced the Limehouse consultation software, in particular how to register, make comments and view what comments have already been made. All comments made on the document will be publicly available.

The meeting finished at 8.45

Date of next meeting: Monday 19th May 2008