

STAFFORD BOROUGH LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

KEY STAKEHOLDER DISCUSSIONS

MEETING WITH STAFFORD WARD MEMBERS (NON PARISHED AREA)
14th 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 P Windmill – Forward Planning Manager, Stafford Borough Council

Mr A Yendole – Principal Planning Officer, Stafford Borough Council

Mr G Unwin – Senior Planning Officer, Stafford Borough Council

Mr B Williscroft – Planning Assistant, Stafford Borough Council

Cllr M M Heenan – Ward Member for Littleworth

Cllr D Allan – Ward Member for Rowley

Cllr P M M Farrington – Ward Member for Rowley

Cllr Mrs J M Dalgarno – Ward Member for Weeping Cross

Cllr W J Kemp – Ward Member for Coton

Cllr B M Cross MBE - Ward Member for Holmcroft

Cllr Mrs A M Loughran – Ward Member for Manor

Cllr R P Cooke - Ward Member for Penside

Introduction.

Cllr Davis introduced the general context for the meeting including issues regarding the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) requirements for Stafford Borough, the Baroness Andrews letter from January 2008 to meet increased housing requirements of 400,000 homes for the West Midlands region and specifically for Stafford Town where at least 7,000 houses are to be provided. Cllr Davis pointed out the existing number of commitments for Stafford town as outlined in the 'Housing Monitor: Land for New Homes'. The Borough has also be provided with 40 hectares of employment land every 5 years in the Regional Spatial Strategy.

Cllr Kemp asked if HP3 at Parkside was still available for housing development.

Mr P Windmill confirmed that this Local Plan allocation had been extended through the Stafford Borough Local Plan 2001.

Cllr Kemp asked whether the 45,000 square metres of office space proposed by the RSS is too high. Cllr Cooke added that this number is the long term total provision to 2026 rather than for immediate provision.

Cllr Davis stated that Stafford should have a strong employment base established on the level of housing for the area to avoid it becoming a dormitory town.

Cllr Farrington asked for clarification on the timeframe of the retail and office provision.

Cllr Davis confirmed that the provision was for Stafford town through until 2026.

Cllr Heenan asked for confirmation that the illustrations are used to identify the respective requirements rather than actual site areas. This point was confirmed by Cllr Davis.

Cllr Mrs Loughran asked whether the office provision was for allocations only or did the requirement include commitments?

Cllr Davis stated that the figures were for new office development at Stafford.

Cllr Cooke asked whether the stated transport proposals were firm proposals?

Cllr Davis stated the following transport improvements are proposed:

- West Coast Mainline improvements;
- Stafford Station improvements;
- West Coast Mainline to bypass Stafford – though this should not be at the expense to Stafford's status as a transport 'hub';
- Completion of the Stafford Eastern Distributor Road (EDR), especially if housing is to be delivered in that locality;
- Traffic Management, including a Park and Ride Scheme.

Cllr Davis pointed out that a Traffic Modal Study is currently being carried out as part of the LDF Evidence Base. Major infrastructure, including transport, must be provided alongside new development and not retrospectively. Government funding had been sought to provide further evidence and studies.

Cllr Heenan stated that the route of the Eastern Distributor Road should be maintained through the new Development Plan.

Cllr Farrington queried the reasons for increased housing numbers (365,000 figure for the West Midlands region rising to 400,000 homes) and asked whether this was due to the issue of affordability and whether this should be applied in a broader sense to allocated sites.

Cllr Davis replied that the figures are Government sourced statistics based on an increasingly elderly population and projected single households. Mr P Windmill stated that the Government's approach was to 'build itself out of the problem' of affordability as stated and promoted through the Barker Review report. The definition of 'affordability' is set out in PPS3: 'Housing' which should be considered at the local level.

The Plan for Stafford Borough – approach and options.

Cllr Davis stated that the location options identified are only 'indicative' at the moment, to ensure all options have been considered. There is a need for infrastructure as well as rural affordable housing, employment provision and the delivery of services and facilities.

Cllr Cooke stated that the West Midlands Regional Assembly has directed 7,000 new houses for Stafford town though the other options within the Development Strategy consultation document suggests that it could be less. Cllr Davis emphasised that it is important to consider all reasonable options. Mr P Windmill stated that the Council could make representations to the submission RSS disagreeing with the 7,000 figure for Stafford, in theory. Therefore it is important to consider other options rather than the 7,000 figure.

Cllr Cross asked whether an Eco-town would count against the Regional Spatial Strategy requirement?

Cllr Davis replied that housing in an Eco-town would not be counted against the Borough's housing requirement.

Cllr Mrs Dalgarno asked about the Government's timeframes for the delivery of housing? The Council will not be building the houses but could Housing Associations deliver the requirements?

Mr P Windmill explained that the Housing & Planning Delivery Grant (HPDG) is based on housing completions, not permission given. Potentially there could be pressure through the Appeals process, with housing granted permission contrary to the Council's decision in order to deliver housing to meet the annual target figure [i.e. 515 completions in the proposed RSS for Stafford Borough]. Cllr Davis added that market forces will dictate the scale of housing delivered. Developers cannot be forced into building houses and the HPDG will be spread over a three year period.

Cllr Kemp asked how constraints such as ground conditions would be taken into account for development around Stafford.

Mr P Windmill stated that building in the floodplain is unacceptable. Cllr Davis added that Residential Development Boundaries (RDBs) would have to be amended to provide for extra growth. Expansion to the south of Stafford is potentially restricted by the border with South Staffordshire District Council, who have reject any development in their area to accommodate Stafford's housing needs. The Regional Spatial Strategy could intervene if a case for expansion south of Stafford is proved to be viable.

Cllr Davis provide feedback from other meetings having taken place with Parish Councils. Affordability in rural areas is a key issue to provide for local people. However there is the mentality of no more houses in rural areas by current residents.

Cllr Allan stated that rural expansion of some Residential Development Boundaries (RDBs) should take place in order to assist affordability and settlements' vitality and viability in terms of services and facilities. Option C for instance would be the best option, especially in terms of public transport. However new infrastructure should support new housing schemes.

Cllr Cooke asked whether if villages are to be expanded, should Residential Development Boundaries be abolished?

Cllr Davis replied that there is some logic in that approach so long as there is a Parish Plan produced to support such expansion for local needs.

Cllr Loughran asked, with regard to the North Housing Market Area Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment, whether Travelling Communities had been consulted, including those who have not necessarily settled here yet? Cllr Davis stated that there are practical difficulties in contacting travelling families who have yet to arrive in the Borough. However the study had been produced to give projections, available on the web-site.

Cllr Mrs Dalgarno asked what infrastructure provision will be made available to meet the RSS figures, including provision on a site-by-site basis.

Cllr Davis stated that evidence based work, such as the traffic model for Stafford will assist in identifying what should be provided. The implications of providing 1,000 houses in a particular location will be included in scenarios for the overall transport network. Mr A Yendole stated that there have been discussions with key stakeholder including other institutions and utility companies. The Government is now requiring Local Planning Authorities to produce an Implementation Strategy explaining how infrastructure is to be provided alongside the Development Strategy. Mr P Windmill highlighted the work to be prepared for the new Community Infrastructure Levy.

Cllr Farrington stated that care should be taken especially on the issue of school places, where in some schools only 1-2 extra children would bring some class sizes to over-capacity and schools may have difficulty in provision

Cllr Cross asked whether landowners who owns the land north of Parkside have expressed an interest in development? Cllr Davis confirmed that the site is being promoted by King Sturge for Akzo Nobel UK Ltd. All sites being promoted, including the agents, will be published and consulted through the second part of the consultation process in April and May 2008.

Mr B Williscroft 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.

Meeting closed at 20:35.