



Civic Centre, Riverside, Stafford

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Dear Members

Cabinet

A meeting of the Cabinet will be held on **Thursday 21 May 2026** at **6.30pm** in the **Craddock Room, Civic Centre, Riverside, Stafford** to deal with the business as set out on the agenda.

Please note that this meeting will be recorded.

Members are reminded that contact officers are shown at the top of each report and members are welcome to raise questions etc in advance of the meeting with the appropriate officer.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "I. Curran".

Head of Law and Governance

CABINET - 21 MAY 2026

Chair - Councillor A T A Godfrey

AGENDA

- 1 Minutes of 9 April 2026 as circulated and published on 10 April 2026
- 2 Apologies
- 3 Councillors' Question Time (if any)
- 4 Proposals of the Cabinet Members (as follows):-

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| (i) | New Local Plan - Notice of Intention to Commence, and Scoping and Engagement Consultations | 3 - 99 |
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Membership

Chair - Councillor A T A Godfrey

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| A T A Godfrey | - Leader |
| R Kenney | - Deputy Leader (Town Centres Regeneration Portfolio) |
| R P Cooke | - Resources Portfolio |
| I D Fordham | - Environment Portfolio |
| J Hood | - Community Portfolio |
| G P K Pardesi | - Leisure Portfolio |
| A N Pearce | - Climate Action and Nature Recovery Portfolio |
| A F Reid | - Economic Development and Planning Portfolio |

Appendix Item 4(a)i**New Local Plan - Notice of Intention to Commence,
and Scoping and Engagement Consultations**

Committee:	Cabinet
Date of Meeting:	21 May 2026
Report of:	Head of Economic Development and Planning
Portfolio:	Economic Development and Planning Portfolio

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 For Cabinet Members to consider progressing the New Local Plan 2025-2045 following publication of Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (LURA) 2023 and subsequent Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026 that came into force on 25 March 2026 together with the latest Government policy and guidance.
- 1.2 Having considered the new requirements, to recommend publishing a New Local Plan timetable to come into effect from 3 June 2026, replacing the Local Development Scheme published in March 2025.
- 1.3 Based on the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026, to recommend progressing with a 'Scoping the Issues and Early Participation', the 'Communication and Engagement Strategy', and 'Sustainability Appraisal / Strategic Environmental Assessment Scoping Report' consultations in June and July 2026.
- 1.4 In accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026, to recommend publishing a Notice of Intention to Commence with the Local Plan process and the Notice of Scoping Consultation on 3 June 2026, and subsequently proceed to Gateway 1 of the new Local Plan system by 30 October 2026.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet approve the New Local Plan 2025-2045 timetable, as set out in paragraph 5.6 of this item, based on the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026 and associated guidance, to be submitted to Government and brought into effect on 3 June 2026. This will be reviewed at Gateway 1 stage. That the Head of Economic Development and

Planning, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Planning, be authorised to make minor amendments to the New Local Plan timetable going forward and update the Government's Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) as appropriate.

- 2.2 That the New Local Plan 2025-2045 Notice of Intention to Commence (Regulation 19) with the Local Plan process and the Notice of Scoping Consultation (Regulation 20) on the New Local Plan, is approved, published and submitted to Government on 3 June 2026, as set out in the **APPENDIX 1** to this item
- 2.3 That the New Local Plan 2025-2045 'Scoping the Issues and Early Participation', the 'Communication and Engagement Strategy', and 'Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment Scoping Report' consultations are approved for public consultation from 8 June until 28 July 2026, referenced in the **BOOKLETS** to this item, together with the supporting documentation.
- 2.4 That the Head of Economic Development and Planning, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Planning, be authorised to finalise consultation material and make factual amendments prior to consultation, to process representations received to the 'Scoping the Issues and Early Participation' the 'Communication and Engagement Strategy', and 'Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment Scoping Report' consultations, and submit the self assessment requirements and proceed to Gateway 1 of the New Local Plan process.

3 Key Issues and Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1 It is important for the Borough Council to make progress on the New Local Plan for Stafford Borough 2025-2045 in order to provide for future development across the Borough through establishing strategic planning policies and specific land allocations.
- 3.2 Since the current Plan for Stafford Borough 2011-2031 was adopted (Part 1 in June 2014 and Part 2 in January 2017) significant changes have occurred locally and nationally impacting upon planning policy. Corporately there is now more of a focus on delivering economic growth and national policy seeks to ensure that development proposals take into account the effects of change on the built and natural environment.
- 3.3 On 6 March 2025 it was agreed to begin the process of advanced work prior to the official start of a new plan under the new plan system covering a plan period 2025-2045, with a new Local Development Scheme (Local Plan timetable) published on 19 March 2025.
- 3.4 On 27 November 2025 the Government published New Local Plan guidance, with the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations

2026 coming into effect on 25 March 2026 together with further policy and guidance provided to support the new plan-making system. Details provided includes the requirements of work to be completed prior to the 30-month period to produce a New Local Plan beginning at Gateway 1.

- 3.5 Stafford Borough Council is now required to publish a Local Plan timetable, submit a Notice of Intention to Commence the New Local Plan and publish a Notice of Scoping Consultation ahead of launching the ‘Scoping the Issues and Early Participation’, the ‘Communication and Engagement Strategy’ and ‘Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment Scoping Report’ consultations, and subsequently move through Gateway 1 at the end of October 2026.

4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 The following vision and priorities from the Council’s Corporate Plan 2025/26 to 2027/28 are considered relevant to this report:

Vision

- “To be an effective Council that promotes a growing economy, strong, healthy communities and a sustainable environment.”

Priorities

- “Prosperous Economy”
- “Communities and Wellbeing”
- “Climate Change, Nature Recovery and the Environment”
- “Effective Council”

5 Report Detail

Plan-making and Legislative update

- 5.1 Proposed reforms to the plan making system have been in development since the Conservative Government published a consultation in July 2023 covering proposals to streamline the plan making system. This was supported by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 (LURA) which introduced the statutory framework for many of the planned reforms. The current Labour Government published their response to the consultation in February 2025. Both parties sought universal plan coverage and an improvement to the time it takes to develop a Local Plan (on average 7 years).

5.2 On 27 November 2025 the Government provided information on the new plan-making system through a series of publications as listed below and the key elements summarised:

- A **written ministerial statement** on the Government's plans to reform local plan making
- An overview of the **30- Month local plan making process**
- **Detailed information** on how the new system will be rolled out; and
- Additional guidance about progressing plans through the new system and the proposed transitional arrangements will be provided by the Planning Advisory Service.

5.3 Subsequent updates have been shared and continue to be provided through MHCLG's Local Plan roadmap web-page to assist with progress different elements of the programme. The guidance on the 30-month timetable explains what is required at each stage. During March 2026 further information was release, explaining what the Government set out in the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026, and the explanatory memorandum: **APPENDIX 2** provides a diagram showing the stages involved in plan making, with key requirements for the new plan-making system including:

- **Digital plan:** expectation that plans will be more map based and less wordy. Take a digital-first approach, prioritising digital formats and complying with defined data standards
- **Timetable:** Local Development Scheme (LDS) replaced by a Local Plan timetable with a universal reporting format. Local planning authorities must revise their timetable to bring it up to date, and reviewed regularly, in line with national guidance.
- **Environmental Assessment:** The Government expect that all local plans will need to carry out Strategic Environmental Assessment. This means that the Council will need to commission a Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environment Assessment and Habitat Regulation Assessment to be published for consultation at the same time as the plan.
- **Timings:** Publishing the timetable, the 'notice to commence' plan making alongside the notice of scoping consultation must all be published together ahead of the Scoping Consultation documentation, at least 4 months before preparing the plan
- **Evidence:** There is no definitive list of evidence that Local Planning Authorities are expected to gather at this stage. Nevertheless it is important to start working on the vision, land availability and evidence before Gateway 1. The Government suggest gathering general evidence such as 'retail, Strategic Housing Market Area Assessment, Employment land and strategic flood risk assessment' during months 1-23 although other evidence based studies will also be required.

- **Consultations:** Notice of Scoping Consultation to be published alongside the notice of intention to commence plan making (no duration specified). There are two stages of public consultation as part of the New Local Plan process with intended durations of 6 weeks and 8 weeks respectively, with consultation summaries to be published following each consultation period.
- **Gateway supervision:** Gateway 1 is self-administrated (must fill in and publish information on a set template), with Gateways 2 and 3 subject to external assessment which determines whether and how the authority proceed. The advice received must be published.
- **Work with key stakeholders throughout:** supplement formal consultations with informal interactions on a more ongoing basis as appropriate, to maintain progress and resolve challenges more proactively. Preparing Statements of Common Ground may also be needed.
- **Examination:** after a local plan has been submitted for examination, the Local Planning Authority may only withdraw the plan if the examiner recommends that they do so or if the Secretary of State directs that the plan is to be withdrawn. There is still the option of a maximum 6 month length pause during the examination to do further work, with the potential to allow an extension to the timeframe if it's necessary to consult on modifications.
- **Policies Map:** The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026 require local planning authorities to bring their policies map up to date as soon as is reasonably practicable after an identified event occurs.
- **Monitoring:** In addition to Authority Monitoring Reports (AMR's) the Council must publish a plan evaluation report in year 4 after the Plan has been adopted which informs the next version of the plan and considers which policies and sites to be taken forward into the next version.
- **Review:** Every 5 years as a minimum - but it may be able to bring existing sites and policies into the new version of the Local Plan.

5.4 As a result of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) published in December 2024 and the consultation proposals in December 2025 it is important to consider the implications for the Stafford Borough New Local Plan 2025-2045 when the next release of the NPPF is released, which is anticipated in the Summer 2026.

5.5 Most recently the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026 were published as secondary legislation to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 and came into effect on 25 March 2026 setting out the requirements for progressing through the new plan-making system. These key requirements include publishing a New Local Plan timetable, a Notice of Intention to Commence a new plan, Notice of Scoping Consultation, seeking responses to a 'Scoping the Issues and Early Participation', the 'Communication and Engagement Strategy', and 'Sustainability

Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment Scoping Report' ahead of reaching Gateway 1.

- 5.6 The New Local Plan 2025 - 2045 timetable being published following approval through this item is set out below, and replaces the Local Development Scheme from March 2025:

Process Stage	Proposed Completion Date
Publish Local Plan timetable	3 June 2026
Publish Notice of Intention to Commence Local Plan preparation	3 June 2026
Publish Notice of Scoping Consultation	3 June 2026
Scoping Consultation	8 June to 28 July 2026
Gateway 1: self assessment of readiness	30 October 2026
Publish Notice of Proposed Local Plan content and evidence consultation	2 June 2027
Consultation: Proposed Local Plan content and evidence	7 June and 27 July 2027
Gateway 2	20 December 2027
Publish Notice of Proposed Local Plan consultation	27 May 2028
Consultation: Proposed Local Plan	5 June and 17 July 2028
Gateway 3	29 September 2028
Submission to Examination	30 October 2028
Adoption	30 April 2029

- 5.7 Changes proposed to be introduced by Summer 2026, as a consequence of the NPPF consultation if finalised, will need to be considered in terms of preparing the new Local Plan 2025-2045. As a result the Borough Council is progressing with the following evidence based documents in preparation for the new plan-making process, including the level of housing requirement to be effectively planned for focused on the standard methodology for local housing need:

- Economic Development and Housing Needs Assessment (EDHNA)
- Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Strategy
- Playing Pitch Strategy and Sports Facilities Strategy
- Gypsy and Traveller Needs Assessment
- Town Centre Capacity Assessment for Stafford, Stone and Eccleshall
- Services and Facilities Assessment

- 5.8 It should be noted that the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 introduced a new strategic planning system, with further details expected throughout this year alongside a new published National Planning Policy Framework following the consultation period that ends on 10 March 2026. The new strategic planning system, which will result in a higher tier of statutory plan being created called Spatial Development Strategies, will have need to be taken into

account when preparing new Local Plans and associated conformity requirements. It should be noted that on 12 February 2026 the Government published a consultation document, available via the link below, seeking responses on strategic planning geographies, including the area for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. The Borough Council responded to this consultation prior to the deadline on 26 March 2026. Further details will be shared in due course.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/areas-for-producing-spatial-development-strategies/areas-for-producing-spatial-development-strategies>

- 5.9 The Government is supporting Council's progressing with new local plans through a £14 million national scheme. Stafford Borough Council submitted an Expression of Interest in late January 2026 and received confirmation of funds amounting to £108,474 on 25 March 2026 to be used for technical studies, additional staffing and engagement work.

Implications

6.1 Financial

The main costs incurred in preparing and finalising the New Local Plan 2025 - 2045 includes the evidence base, community engagement and consultation, and the independent Examination process prior to adoption.

Council agreed in February 2026 as part of the budgets an amount of approximately £865,000 to deliver the local plan over the budget period 2026/27 to 2029/30.

6.2 Legal

The New Local Plan has to be prepared in accordance with the relevant Planning Acts and regulations, and be aligned with related national planning policy and guidance. The Plan will need in accordance with the Council's constitution to be formally endorsed by Full Council prior to publication and on adoption.

Failure to follow the statutory plan-making process under the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026, including the Gateway 1 requirements, may expose the Council to legal challenge, delay progression of the Local Plan, and result in findings of non-compliance or unsoundness at examination.

6.3 Human Resources

The New Local Plan will be delivered by existing staff from within Economic Development and Planning, and the wider organisation, together with support from specialist consultants.

6.4 Risk Management

An adopted local plan for Stafford Borough is in place. However, there is a requirement on Local Planning Authorities to review Local Plans and ensure policies are up to date. For plans to be reviewed and kept up to date. A delay and/or uncertainty at the local level without a new Local Plan being produced could lead to legal challenges and/or planning appeals with potential significant costs for the Council.

Whilst the Council will seek to ensure that the New Local Plan is progressed in accordance with the latest timetable and minimise any risks of delay it should be noted that the following external factors are beyond the Council's control and may have an impact:

- Changes in legislation, Regulations and policy including Local Government Re-organisation
- Unanticipated scale and nature of consultation responses received including new evidence submitted unexpectedly
- Failure of key partners and other agencies to deliver evidence on time and make responses to key elements of the process
- Unanticipated delays in external events such as resource capacity of the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) for the Examination process or failure to deliver robust arrangements for this process

It should be noted that the following risks can be considered and effectively managed by the Council:

- Staff turnover, recruitment difficulties and sickness absences leading to inadequate skills base
- Political changes, procedural delays or failure to meet Council deadlines
- Non-conformity and failure in the tests of soundness for new planning policy documents

The Council will continue to closely monitor changes to legislation, regulations and policy as part of updating the Local Plan whilst deploying robust programme management techniques to deliver evidence and digital services as required through the process, including regularly engaging with the Planning Inspectorate. All internal risks will be reviewed when required and proposed actions delivered efficiently.

6.5 Equalities and Diversity

The New Local Plan 2025-2045 will provide clear guidance to developers, and also members of the public, through planning policies and proposals in across the Borough. This will enable any resident or business to see the

requirements related to future development. There are no direct impacts identified for Age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation at this stage.

The New Local Plan will deliver a statutory development plan which is designed to be inclusive to all residents and those interested in planning the future for the Borough.

Throughout the process of preparing the New Local Plan a thorough consultation and engagement process will enable residents and interested parties to be involved in its preparation, including 24/7 access to key documents through the Borough Council's website.

6.6 **Health**

Working from a consistent evidence base through the Borough Council and with partners, ensures that recommendations made in relation to the New Local Plan 2025-2045 with policy-specific areas are consistent and complementary to an approach that supports equality in both service provision and health outcomes. Specific reference will be made when details of the New Local Plan 2025-2045 are made available.

6.7 **Climate Change**

Working from a consistent evidence base through the Borough Council and with partners, ensures that recommendations made in relation to the New Local Plan 2025-2045 with policy-specific areas are consistent and complementary to an approach that supports equality in both service provision and climate change outcomes. Specific reference will be made when details of the New Local Plan 2025-2045 are made available.

6 **Appendices**

Appendix 1: Notice of Intention to Commence Local Plan Preparation

Notice for Scoping Consultation

Appendix 2: New Local Plan process - Key Stages

7 **Previous Consideration**

6 March 2025 Cabinet Agenda and Minutes via link below:

<https://www.staffordbc.gov.uk/24-25-Committee-Meetings>

8 Background Papers

File available in Economic Development and Planning together with the following information available via the Stafford Borough Council website links:

www.staffordbc.gov.uk/local-plan

www.staffordbc.gov.uk/meecebrook-new-garden-settlement

Contact Officer:	Alex Yendole
Telephone Number:	07800 619530
Ward Interest:	All
Report Track:	Cabinet - 21/5/2026 (Only)
Key Decision:	Yes

Appendix 1

The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England)

Regulations 2026 (Regulation 19)

Notice of Intention to Commence Local Plan Preparation

Stafford Borough New Local Plan 2025-2045

Stafford Borough Council is publishing this Notice of Intention to commence the Stafford Borough New Local Plan 2025-2045 to cover the whole of the Stafford Borough administrative area. The purpose of this Notice is to give communities and other stakeholders advanced notice of plan-making in order to understand when and how they can get involved in the process.

The New Local Plan timetable will be published on the Stafford Borough Council website and will be accessible through the following webpage, together with other relevant documentation:

<https://www.staffordbc.gov.uk/new-local-plan-2025-to-2045>

Alternatively copies of documents related to the Stafford Borough New Local Plan 2025-2045 can be inspected at Ground Floor Reception, Stafford Borough Council, Civic Centre, Riverside, Stafford, during normal office hours Monday - Thursday 08.30-17.00, Friday 08.30-16.30. Reference copies have been supplied to Public Libraries within Stafford Borough.

This notice has been made available from 3 June 2026.

The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England)

Regulations 2026 (Regulation 20)

Notice of Scoping Consultation

Stafford Borough New Local Plan 2025-2045

Stafford Borough Council is publishing this Notice of Scoping Consultation to invite representations on the Stafford Borough New Local Plan 2025-2045 through the following documents to cover the whole of the Stafford Borough administrative area:

- Scoping the Issues and Early Participation
- Communication and Engagement Strategy
- Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment Scoping Report

The purpose of this Notice is to give communities and other stakeholders the opportunity to make representations on matters relevant to the preparation of the New Local Plan including what the plan should contain, as well as how the Council will engage and involve stakeholders in the preparation of the New Local Plan.

Copies of documents related to this consultation stage for the Stafford Borough New Local Plan 2025-2045 will be published on the Stafford Borough Council website and will be accessible through the following webpage:

<https://www.staffordbc.gov.uk/new-local-plan-2025-to-2045>

Alternatively copies of documents related to the Stafford Borough New Local Plan 2025-2045 can be inspected at Ground Floor Reception, Stafford Borough Council, Civic Centre, Riverside, Stafford, during normal office hours Monday - Thursday 08.30-17.00, Friday 08.30-16.30. Reference copies have been supplied to Public Libraries within Stafford Borough.

Representations on the matters contained in the New Local Plan 2025-2045 documents should be received by Stafford Borough Council before 12 noon on Tuesday 28 July 2026 using the following email address:

Strategicplanningconsultations@staffordbc.gov.uk

Please submit comments using the online consultation form available here: **(Web-link to be inserted following Cabinet)**

Alternatively representations must be received before 12 noon on Tuesday 28 July 2026 by hard copy post to Ground Floor Reception, Stafford Borough Council, Civic Centre, Riverside, Stafford, ST16 3AQ.

Requests to be notified at a specific address when one of the following New Local Plan stages occurs should be provided using the following email address or via post to Ground Floor Reception, Stafford Borough Council, Civic Centre, Riverside, Stafford, ST16 3AQ:

Strategicplanningconsultations@staffordbc.gov.uk

- Consultation on proposed Local Plan content and evidence (Regulation 23)
- Publication of observations or advice
- Consultation on the Proposed Local Plan (Regulation 27)
- Submission of the Proposed Local Plan for Examination
- Independent Examination of the Local Plan (Regulation 35)
- Decision of the Examiner to consider further matters and pause the Examination
- Publication of document and evidence related to further matters
- Publication of the Examiner Report with recommendations and reasons
- Adoption or approval of the Local Plan

This notice has been made available from 3 June 2026.

Appendix 2

New Local Plan system - Key Stages



Stafford Borough New Local Plan Communication and Engagement Strategy

Introduction

The Communication and Engagement Strategy (CES) sets out how the Council will involve the community and other stakeholders in the main planning functions of preparing a local plan (or other planning policy document). Consultation and engagement concerning planning applications and the decision-making process is covered by other processes. For plan-making this document sets out:

- What will be consulted upon;
- Who we will consult;
- When the Council will consult; and
- How the Council will consult (methods used to consult).

The CES will also provide information about:

- The role of elected councillors, parish and town councils, and voluntary and community groups in planning matters;
- Who you can contact for assistance in local planning matters, and
- What will be expected of you when you make comments and how those comments will be presented.

Legal Requirements

There is a clear emphasis throughout national policy on encouraging early and consistent community involvement. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the online Planning Practice Guidance encourages front-loading engagement and co-operation with the community so that local plans reflect a collective vision and agreed set of priorities. They also highlight the importance of early community engagement before planning and other applications are submitted.

Specifically for plan making, the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026 sets out the steps to produce local plans and supplementary planning documents. It sets out who is to be included at each consultation and which documents are available at each stage of the process.

Vision and Our Commitment to You

Our Vision

The Borough Council believes that local community participation and involvement is central to the delivery of sustainable development and helps to provide effective planning for the future.

Our vision is “to provide a platform for people to express their views on planning matters and share their local knowledge in an interactive and inclusive manner, to help inform plan making decisions and create effective strategies.”

To achieve our vision we will,

- create and prepare planning policy documents in a user-friendly manner
- ensure our methods and approach are transparent and accessible to help people understand the plan making process better
- record and consider views to help inform Planning Policy Documents
- seek to work with groups and individuals who do not normally engage with plan making
- encourage developers to engage with local communities on their proposals as soon as practicable.

The Planning System

The Planning System plays a key role in shaping the use of land and development to provide attractive, vibrant and well-designed places to live and work. Whilst it seeks to conserve and protect the environment, it also aims to provide new development that meets the needs for new housing, employment, and other facilities. This inevitably involves making some challenging decisions. The role of the Local Planning Authority is to make balanced decisions after considering consultation responses and other material planning matters.

Plan Making

Plan Making is referred to as planning policy or spatial planning. Plan Making requires Local Planning Authorities to produce a Local Plan for the area which sets out how the area will develop over a period of time. The Local Plan policies will be used to guide future development and provide the framework for decisions on planning applications.

The process of creating a Local Plan requires Local Planning Authorities to identify and engage, at an early stage, with all those that may be interested in the development or content of the Local Plan, and with groups who may be affected by proposals. With the help of the local community and the collation of an evidence base, the Local Planning Authority will identify options for addressing local development needs, to inform a preferred approach for future development. This requires carrying out a robust community consultation with local communities, businesses and other interested parties.

The Local Plan

The Local Plan is prepared through a process of engagement and community involvement, with a timetable setting out details of all the Local Plan documents (including supporting documents) and those that we are or will be progressing. The preparation of each of these documents will provide important opportunities for communities to get involved in shaping the places in which they live.

The process of producing the Local Plan and associated documents involves several stages as set out in the image below:



Access to background local plan documents and evidence base

The documents prepared as part of the Local Plan are prepared on the basis of a sound and up-to-date evidence base. All relevant evidence base studies,

assessments or strategies will be made available on the Council website. Paper copies of these documents can be made available upon request subject to the relevant fees and charges.

The adopted Local Plan is made up of the Plan for Stafford Borough 2011-2031 and Part 2 which is now being replaced with work started on a New Local Plan (2025-2045) including evidence based studies, establishing a Brownfield Land Register and initial consultation exercises. Future work on all of these aspects will need to meet the requirements set out in this document, when finalised following this consultation.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

Local Plan documents are subject to the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) process. The SEA assess the preparation of the Local Plan's policies and proposals as these are development against social, environmental and economic objectives to ensure the best approach is delivered. A key element of the SEA process is the baseline information established through survey data. A series of SEA reports produced through the preparation of the Local Plan are consulted upon alongside the policies and proposals.

Supplementary Plans

Supplementary Plans are complementary documents that provide further details and guidance to policies contained in the Local Plan, and are used as material considerations in reaching planning decisions.

Supplementary Plans take many forms, ranging from a master plan or development brief, to design guides and general additional guidance produced by the Council.

Engage in the Local Plan

This section explains how and when you can be involved in influencing and informing the production of the development plan and other planning policy documents for the Stafford Borough. Legislation sets out which documents need to be in place, the processes to produce those documents and the minimum requirements for involvement in their production.

How we involve you in the Local Plan

Advertising and notification of forthcoming opportunities to be involved is essential. To improve efficiency, the council will make use of electronic communication tools and build upon existing communication channels wherever possible. The council will engage, involve and consult on planning matters in line with the latest regulations and guidance as appropriate and relevant.

An assessment under the equalities regulations may be appropriate and a requirement for some planning policy documents. Equality Impact Assessments (EQIA) may be undertaken as a tool for ensuring that equality, social inclusion and community cohesion issues are considered when drawing up policies.

The Town and Country Planning (Local planning) (England) Regulations 2012 define the 'specific consultation bodies' we must consult with (list below). The Regulations

define 'general consultation bodies' as voluntary bodies some or all of whose activities benefit any part of the authority's area and other bodies who represent, in the authority's area, the interests of different racial, ethnic or national groups; different religious groups; disabled persons; and, business interests.

Your involvement in the Local Plan

To ensure that your involvement is effective you will be expected to:

- Make your representation/comments within the specified time period;
- Provide comments in a clear and succinct format, ensuring that representations relate to the issues and documents being consulted upon;
- Be aware that your comments with your name attached (for local plan and planning policy consultations) will be made publicly available with personal and sensitive information redacted in line with the Council's privacy notices;
- Be understanding and respectful of alternative views. We have a zero tolerance of abusive language etc. All comments are moderated and any that are considered to fall short of these requirements will be rejected; and
- If you are replying on behalf of a group or organisation, consider and explain how members of the group have been involved in formulating the representation.

Role of elected councilors

The role of locally elected councilors in representing the views and concerns of residents in the planning process is very important. However, your views can only be formally considered when you make them in writing (traditional or email) to the Council within the specified time for a particular consultation.

Parish Councils

Parish and town councils play a vital role in community involvement in the planning system and the production of neighbourhood plans. Parish and town councillors can comment on the preparation of policy documents that may affect their area as well as the Borough. Parish and town councils have an important role when identifying priorities in their areas and provide a valuable means of sharing information about the planning process to their local community. This is particularly important for when parish and town councils produce a neighbourhood plan.

Role of voluntary and community groups

We believe that everyone should have the opportunity to be actively involved in decisions that affect them and their community. Voluntary and community groups are encouraged to be involved in planning matters and can represent their members. Please see the following sections for how to register to be involved in planning policy documents.

Less well-represented groups

We are aware that some people and groups are less well-represented or thought to be 'hard to reach'. We also understand that particular groups may have specific areas of interest or a limited capacity for involvement. Every opportunity will be taken to add to our awareness of such groups; to increase engagement and to identify

issues and policies that are likely to be of particular concern and we welcome proactive suggestions to increase such engagement. Documents and information will be made available in alternative formats upon request.

Please note: News updates can only be sent to those that sign up to and remain on the Local Plan consultation list.

The Local Plan Process

The preparation of the Local Plan represents the most resource intensive strand of Local Plan preparation, particularly in relation to community involvement.

To prepare the policies and proposals for the Development Plan, the Borough Council will consult with the community and statutory organisations listed in Appendix 1 and 2, and establish the main issues for the document to address as part of developing policy options and key matters.

Scoping, Early Participation and Evidence Gathering

This stage of the Local Plan is intended to be wide ranging and informal. It will invite discussion on the objectives of the relevant plan making document and the options available for achieving those objectives. The Council will not put forward any specific proposals at this stage.

The council will also at this stage be collecting information on a range of socio-economic. Furthermore, survey information will be sought on key elements of the Local Plan, including a Call for Sites exercise alongside key housing and employment statistics. Additionally, each year the Brownfield Land Register will be reviewed to identify new development sites, which will include potential sites through the Permission In Principle approach.

The local community and stakeholders are encouraged to provide their details via a consultation database so that they can be kept informed throughout the following stages.

Representations at this stage should be on the questions raised. You will be able to comment online, email or via letter.

If you are requesting the allocation of a specific site for development, then it is highly desirable that you engage with the Council at this early stage so that community involvement is maximised and appraisal work can be undertaken on the proposed site through the plan preparation process. Development proposals can be more robustly assessed if the site and its proposed use are clearly defined. You can submit your land via the **Call for Sites** webpage.

Vision and Strategy

The Council will use the responses and information gathered during the Scoping the Issues and Early Participation stage to develop:

- Draft vision and proposed aims and objectives
- Proposed spatial strategy

- Initial draft policies
- Summary of evidence gathered and evidence still to gather

This stage will set out the Council's preferred approach to delivering the objectives identified as part of Scoping the Issues and Early Participation stage through the Proposed Local Plan content and evidence.

The community and stakeholders, including statutory organisations, will be encouraged to participate in the on-going policy development process and a range of consultation / engagement methods will be used to help achieve this. Following on from the early engagement on key matters, the Council will consult on the Proposed Local Plan content and evidence for a minimum period of 6 weeks.

This stage provides an opportunity for representations which suggest alternative options for delivery of the Local Plan objectives. You will be able to comment on this stage either online or via email or by letter.

If you are requesting the allocation of a site for development you will be expected to clearly define the site, the uses proposed for the site, describe any community involvement already undertaken and why you think that the proposed site is a more sustainable option than those put forward by the Council.

Publication and submission

Following preparation of the Proposed Local Plan the Borough Council will publish a final version and invite comments on the document from the community, statutory organisations and other interested parties as part of an 8 week consultation stage.

This is effectively the final stage to submit formal representations to the Borough Council on the Proposed Local Plan. The Borough Council will then submit the Proposed Local Plan, the Sustainability Appraisal and the entire evidence base, including the representations made, to the Secretary of State for an Examination in Public.

Examination

An independent Inspector is appointed to undertake an Examination in Public (EiP), to test the legal compliance and soundness of the Proposed Local Plan whilst considering all representations made at the Publication stage.

Prior to the EiP, the Borough Council must publish an advert notifying the public, including any interested parties, about details of the Examination.

Anybody who submitted representations at the Publication stage will have the opportunity to present their case to the Inspector.

The Planning Inspector will decide on how to best proceed with the EiP, identifying issues which should be debated. Generally the EiP includes a series of formal hearing which are chaired by the Planning Inspector.

A Programme Officer will be appointed from outside of the Planning Department and will be responsible for managing all the arrangements of the Examination process, including collating all documents, where appropriate, organising site visits and

dealing with all correspondence. The Programme Officer reports to the Planning Inspector and will be the main point of contact for members of the public through the EiP.

During the Examination in Public stage the Council may propose Main Modifications to the document, if these are needed to make it “sound”. If this is the case further consultation on the proposed changes will be carried out.

Adoption of the Local Plan

Following the conclusion of the EiP the Inspector will produce a report setting out any changes the Borough Council must make to the document before it can be adopted. The Inspectors Report and its recommendations are binding on the Council (i.e. the Council must accept these changes should it take forward the Local Plan to adoption).

Should the Council seek to adopt the Local Plan, the modifications suggested by the Inspector must be undertaken and then a formal decision must be made by Council Members to adopt the Local Plan for planning purposes.

Following a Member decision to adopt, the Council must notify all consultees registered on the Planning Policy Consultation Database of their intention to adopt the document for planning purposes. A notice of adoption will be placed in all relevant newspaper press and will include information on the statutory rights of appeal.

Supplementary Plans

Supplementary Plans (SPs) relate to specific sites or specific planning issues and have the same weight as a local plan for the purpose of decision-making. This would also include Infrastructure Levy regimes to apply at the local level for securing developer contributions in the future.

There is a three-stage process for the preparation of Supplementary Plans, this includes:

- Evidence Gathering
- The Preparation and Consultation of a Draft Supplementary Plan
- The Adoption of the SPs by Stafford Borough Council

The key principles for community involvement which are applied to the preparation of Local Plans equally applies to the preparation of Supplementary Plans.

The approach to community involvement will remain to engage as many people who are interested in the issue / area as possible although it should be recognised that there is little value in engaging groups whose interests may lie outside both the geographical scope and the subject scope of the document consultation. Any community involvement on SPs should be relevant, proportionate and efficient.

The Borough Council will arrange for an independent Inspector to examine the Supplementary Plan. Prior to the Examination, the Borough Council must publish an advert notifying the public, including any interested parties, about details of the Examination.

The procedure for the examination of supplementary plans is set out in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 Section 15DB.

Neighbourhood Plans

Designation of Neighbourhood Plan Area

A Parish Council or Neighbourhood Forum can submit an application to the Borough Council requesting for a Neighbourhood Plan Area to be designated.

The Borough Council will publicise the Neighbourhood Plan Area Application and carry out a statutory consultation for a period of 4 weeks before it is considered for designation as a Neighbourhood Plan Area. The Borough Council will then publish details of its decision, including a map of the designated area.

Preparation of Neighbourhood Plan

The Parish Council or Neighbourhood Forum will prepare their Neighbourhood Plan in accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012, and the Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017. This involves collecting evidence, engagement and consultation with the local community on issues and options, and developing draft planning policies for inclusion in the Neighbourhood Plan.

The Borough Council will provide assistance and advice to the Parish Council or Neighbourhood Forum throughout the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan in a timely manner when requested. Prior to the draft Neighbourhood Plan being subject to consultation, the Borough Council will prepare a Screening Report to assess the environmental implications. The Screening Report will be subject to a six-week consultation exercise with the statutory environmental agencies. Submission and Publication.

The Parish Council or Neighbourhood Forum are required to submit the Neighbourhood Plan to the Borough Council who will then publish the proposed Neighbourhood Plan for a six-week period of consultation. The Borough Council will notify all relevant stakeholders and invite comments during the consultation stage.

Examination

The Borough Council will arrange for an independent Inspector to examine the Neighbourhood Plan. Prior to the Examination, the Borough Council must publish an advert notifying the public, including any interested parties, about details of the Examination.

Adoption of Neighbourhood Plan

Following receipt of the Inspector’s Report, this recommends any changes required and whether the Neighbourhood Plan can proceed to a referendum (vote).

The Council will publish the Inspector’s Report and arrange a referendum. If the Neighbourhood Plan is successful at referendum (achieved more than a 50% yes vote) the Borough Council will then adopt the Neighbourhood Plan and it will be used in the determination of Planning Applications in the Neighbourhood Plan Area.

Note: The Parish Council or Neighbourhood Forum preparing a Neighbourhood Plan is responsible for undertaking community engagement and consultation before the proposed Plan is submitted. Consulting with the wider community in the early plan making process could increase the likelihood of the Neighbourhood Plan being successful at the referendum stage.

Planning Policy Consultations

Who we will consult

In the preparation of Planning Policy Documents, a wide range of individuals, groups, representatives and organisations will be consulted.

In line with statutory obligations, the Borough Council is required to provide a ‘specific consultation’ list of statutory organisations who must be consulted (please see Appendix 1) and a ‘general consultation’ list of those who may wish to be consulted (please see Appendix 2) on Planning Policy Documents. These lists of bodies are not definitive and the Borough Council may need to consult with other organisations at the appropriate time.

Stafford Borough Council wants to ensure that all stakeholders have every opportunity to be involved with the preparation of Planning Policy Documents and no groups/organisations and individuals, including hard to reach groups, are excluded.

Stafford Borough Council maintains a database of over 3,000 consultees, which largely consists of those who have expressed an interest in being involved in the preparation of Planning Policy Documents. These are identified as key stakeholders and are shown in the table below.

Table 1: Key Stakeholders

Local Interest Groups	Residents	Businesses	Individuals
Neighbouring Local Authorities	Statutory Organisations	Land Owners	Councillors and MPs
Voluntary and Community Groups	Parish Councils	Developers	Hard to Reach Groups

Any resident, business or interested party can be included in this database by contacting the Borough Council’s Strategic Planning and Placemaking team on 01785 619000. The Borough Council will comply with the General Data Protection Regulations (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 to ensure personal information is kept confidential and secure.

Duty to Cooperate/Statement of Common Ground

The Council has previously been required, under Section 110 of the Localism Act 2011, to engage with neighbouring authorities and other statutory organisations to satisfy the ‘Duty to Cooperate’ legal requirement, including where appropriate through Statements of Common Ground. This was to ensure that neighbouring authorities and relevant organisations work together to meet development requirements and address any strategic cross boundary issues.

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 removed the need for Duty to Cooperate to streamline the plan-making process. Nevertheless authorities still need to collaborate across their boundaries, including on unmet development needs from neighbouring areas in line with National Planning Policy Framework policies which stipulate ‘maintaining effective cooperation.’

Stafford Borough Council has worked closely with all relevant Duty to Cooperate organisations throughout the production of the adopted Plan for Stafford Borough. The Borough Council remains committed to effective cross-boundary collaboration in the preparation of future Planning Policy Documents.

How we will consult

Stafford Borough Council will use a range of methods to involve local people and strengthen community involvement. The table below describes the various methods used for consulting on Planning Policy Documents.

Table 2: Methods for consulting on planning policy documents

Letters and Emails	Letters and emails sent out to notify relevant stakeholders about a consultation on Planning Policy Documents
Parish Forum Meetings	Attendance at Parish Forum meetings to provide Parish Councils with information on Planning Policy Documents
Display boards	Display boards are set up in the reception of Council Offices to raise awareness of consultation on Planning Policy Documents and how people can get involved
Public Exhibitions and Workshops	Exhibitions are set up in various locations across the Borough to provide information on Planning Policy Documents. Workshops are organised to gather information and feedback from members of the public and other stakeholders to help inform Planning Policy Documents
Press Release / Notice	Press releases / notices are issued to the local newspapers and local radio stations to raise awareness about consultation on Planning Policy Documents

Libraries	Hard copies of Planning Policy Documents, with response forms, are distributed to local Libraries for people to view and make comments
Council website www.staffordbc.gov.uk	Details of Planning Policy Documents are published on the website for the public to view, including details of the consultation and how to respond

What we will do with your comments

All representations will receive an automatic acknowledgement of the representation if received by e-mail. The Borough Council will also accept comments by letter and will process them in the same manner as other representations.

All representations will be electronically recorded and then published on the Borough Council's website, or through the Neighbourhood Planning Bodies website as relevant, for the public to view. They will be considered and used to help inform the production of Planning Policy Documents

Monitoring and Review

Stafford Borough Council is committed to strengthening local community participation and stakeholder involvement in the planning process.

Each year the Council monitors and reviews the progress and effectiveness of the Local Plan in an annual Authority Monitoring Report. In addition, and where appropriate, the Council will carry out a periodic review of the Local Plan.

In accordance with the Authority Monitoring Report, the Council will also review consultation activities that have been carried out in accordance with the Statement of Community Involvement. This is to ensure the methods and techniques used to engage with all stakeholders of the community are effective and robust.

The Council will use the following indicators to measure outcomes.

- Number of people participating in consultation
- Number of people using the Council's online website to make representations

If significant changes are required to meet new circumstances or legislation changes, a review of the Communications and Engagement Strategy will be undertaken.

Engagement tools

	Development Plan Documents						Supplementary Plans			Neighbourhood Plans				Community Infrastructure Levy				
Method	Evidence Gathering and Early Engagement – where relevant Brownfield Land	Brownfield Land Register - Call for Sites	Development of Policy Options	Publication and Submission	Examination in Public	Adoption	Publication of Draft SP	Examination in Public	Adoption	Designate Neighbourhood Plan	Submission and Publication	Examination	Adoption	Preliminary Draft Charging Schedule	Draft Charging Schedule	Examination in Public	Adoption	
Letters and Emails	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Parish Forum Meeting			X															
Display boards			X															
Public exhibition and workshop			X															
Press Release/Notice		X	X		X	X	X	X	X									
Libraries		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X			X
Council website	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Online Q&A Session			X	X			X											

How can I have my say on this consultation document?

Consultation on the new Local Plan 2025-2045: Engagement and Communication Strategy will take place between 8 June and 28 July 2026. Please provide any responses by 12 noon on Tuesday 28 July 2026.

We strongly encourage responses to be made using the pro-forma available on the Council's website at [Strategic Planning and Placemaking Consultations | Stafford Borough Council](#) and emailing completed forms to strategicplanningconsultations@staffordbc.gov.uk

Alternatively, if you choose to use e-mail please identify the question, section or page number to which your comments refer.

How will my comments be used?

We will acknowledge receipt of your comments and fully consider responses for the next stage of the plan-making process, although the Council will not engage through individual correspondence. All comments received will be published on the Council's website in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018.

Protecting Your Privacy

We believe you should always know what data we collect from you and how we use it, and that you should have meaningful control over both. As part of our ongoing commitment to transparency, and in relation to the General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018, we have updated our Privacy Policy.

We will only use your personal information to send you information on the Local Plan and associated planning policy matters. You can find information about how we handle your personal data by visiting www.staffordbc.gov.uk/privacynotices and if you have any queries or would like to unsubscribe from receiving information please contact the Strategic Planning and Placemaking team using the details above.

Appendix 1: Specific Organisation Bodies for Plan Making

Adjoining Local Planning Authorities

Civil Aviation Authority

Highways England (West Midlands)

Historic England

Homes England

Local gas and electricity providers

Local sewerage and water providers

Marine Management Organisation

Ministry of Defence

Natural England

Neighbourhood Planning Bodies (Parish Councils / Neighbourhood Forums)

Network Rail

NHS Property Services

Office of Rail Regulation

Public Health Commissioning Leads and Strategic Delivery Managers at Staffordshire County Council

South Staffordshire and Shropshire Healthcare NHS Trust

Stafford and Surrounds Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)

Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Partnership NHS Trust

Staffordshire County Council (including Highways Authority)

Staffordshire Police

Strategic Rail Authority

The Coal Authority

The Environment Agency

Town and Parish Councils within Stafford Borough as well as those adjoining the Borough

University Hospitals of North Midlands Trust

Appendix 2: General Consultation Bodies for Plan Making

Airport Operators' Association

Amenity groups

Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership

Canal and River Trust

Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Charities

Civic Societies

Community groups and residents' associations

Countryside/conservation groups

Culture, Recreation and Faith groups

Defence Infrastructure Organisation

Disability groups

Ethnic minority groups

General Members of the Public

Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership

Health groups

Home Builders Federation

Housing interest groups and housing associations

Inland Waterways Association

Landowners and Developers

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender groups

Local business groups

Local Councillors and MPs

Local Canal Societies

Local interest groups

Local media

Local Public Transport Providers

Local telecommunication providers

21 April 2026

National Association of Gypsy and Traveller Officers, The National Federation of Gypsy Liaison Groups, and the Gypsy Council

Older groups

Railway Infrastructure Managers including HS2

Sport England

Stafford District Voluntary Service (SDVS)

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Local Enterprise Partnership

Staffordshire Wildlife Trust

Transport for London

Transport for West Midlands

Voluntary and Community Infrastructure Organisation (VAST)

Woodland Trust

Young Persons group

Stafford Borough New Local Plan 2025 - 2045

Scoping the Issues and Early Participation

Stafford Borough is changing - help us shape it.

We are at the early stages of creating this new Local Plan, and it's very important to us that you're part of the process from the beginning. This is a great opportunity to help make sure we're going in the right direction from the start.

We're currently trying to understand the main issues facing our Borough and how we might be able to use the Local Plan to address them - you're the best people to help us understand this.

The new Stafford Borough Local Plan will replace the Plan for Stafford Borough 2011-2031 adopted in June 2014 and Part 2 of the Plan for Stafford Borough adopted in January 2017. The new Local Plan will guide where new development takes place across the Borough area over the Plan period 2025-2045 by describing what change will occur and identify how places will be shaped in the future.

Preparation of the New Local Plan must follow the statutory stages set out in the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026, including defined gateway stages, as reflected in the Council's Local Development Scheme. This document forms part of the early participation and engagement stage of plan preparation under the new plan making system. This is to ensure that local people and other stakeholders are fully engaged in the process, which is summarised below. Whilst the Council will aim to meet this timetable due to the complex nature of the work the programme will be kept under regular review.

How things are now

Addressing the Climate Emergency

The Council has a Net Zero Carbon goal by 2035, a Climate Change Strategy, and a Corporate Plan that identifies "Climate Change, Nature Recovery and the Environment" as one of the four major priorities.

All Staffordshire District/Borough authorities have jointly committed to fully explore climate responsive policy development, subject to Member approval, feasibility and viability considerations

Our commitment remains that we will do all we can through the Local Plan to ensure we mitigate and adapt to Climate Change through reducing carbon emissions, increasing biodiversity and managing flood risks.

Protecting our unique places and landscapes

The Borough's rich heritage, spanning prehistoric origins through Roman, medieval, and industrial eras, forms a vital part of our identity and daily experience. The natural landscape of the borough is characterised by flat, low-lying land between the rivers Trent, Penk and Sow. Much of the area is intensively farmed agricultural land (including stock farming), interspersed with ancient and semi-natural woodland and grasslands. The upland landscape in the south-east of the borough is nationally recognised through its designation as part of the Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The borough contains Ramsar sites (wetlands of international importance designated under The Convention on Wetlands, known as the Ramsar Convention, an intergovernmental environmental treaty which came into force in 1975) at Aqualate Mere, Chartley Moss and Cop Mere, 15 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and 4 Special Area of Conservation (SAC) at Cannock Chase, Motte Meadows, Chartley Moss and Pasturefields.

There are two areas of Green Belt in the borough. Extensive parts of the north of the borough lie within the North Staffordshire Green Belt while part of the south-eastern area of the borough is designated as part of the West Midlands Green Belt.

Quality of life and affordability

We're an area in demand for housing. Median house prices and affordability ratios in the borough are below national averages, but above those for the West Midlands. The median housing affordability ratio for workplace-based earnings in 2021 was 7.71, compared to 9.05 for England and 7.50 for the West Midlands.

Traffic and Transport

The borough has excellent transport links, including the M6, West Coast Mainline rail and in future including access to the strategic rail network, with proposed High Speed 2 (HS2). Although the borough is relatively self-contained, there are important economic linkages with both the West Midlands and north Staffordshire conurbations.

Many of our local roads are reaching or have reached their capacity to accommodate cars. This causes congestion and air quality issues on some of our main transport corridors and neighbourhoods. We have some great opportunities to improve our accessibility to public transport, cycling and walking but they need the right investment to be realised. We are also a rural place, so whilst it's right to expand our reliance on more sustainable, low carbon methods of travel we must accept that it won't be an answer for all of us.

Securing Economic Prosperity

We are home to some really important sources of employment - Newcastle and Stafford Group College, Staffordshire University, Stafford hospital, General Electrics. These are important sources of employment for local people and attract other forms of investment to the district. They need to be supported so that they can continue to

be successful in the future. We also need to make sure that we support businesses through challenging and volatile economic times to make sure that the district is economically prosperous.

Stafford Borough has a relatively strong economy. Unemployment rates have been consistently lower than the national average. Stafford Borough has a relatively high skills level, with 40.9% of residents have Level 1, 2 or 3 qualifications, 50.6% having an apprenticeship, and 35.1% having level 4 qualifications and above. The average earnings of borough residents are higher than the West Midlands and England averages. But the average earnings for jobs in the borough are below the averages for the West Midlands and England.

Development and Infrastructure

This plan needs to make sure there is a more diverse offering of development opportunities in the district, both in terms of location, size, type and tenure. It will also be important that new infrastructure is delivered alongside new development, to reduce pressures on existing facilities. This must include public transport, education, sewerage treatment facilities, health care and open space.

Local Plan Vision

As part of the new Local Plan, we need to develop a land use planning (spatial) vision for the future of the borough. To help inform the spatial vision we would like to know your thoughts.

- (1) What would you like this borough to be like in the future?
- (2) What do you think we should change and how?
- (3) What would you change in your local neighbourhood or area to make it a better place to live?

What should we be considering?

We would also like to know what you think are the things we really need to be considering in developing our evidence base. We would like to know your thoughts on:

- (1) What matters or issues should be looked at by the new Local Plan?
- (2) Why are these matters or issues important?

Please feel free to refer to climate change, the economy, housing, heritage, the environment, infrastructure, transport, community facilities and health in your response.

Key Themes (proposed)

The Local Plan will cover lots of themes and we'd like to know your thoughts on the following questions.

Theme 1: Addressing Climate Emergency

What do we need to do in response to climate change and the climate emergency?

Theme 2: Design, Healthy Lifestyles and Safe Communities

How can we make our communities healthier, provide better facilities and support high quality design in new development?

Theme 3: Nature Recovery and Biodiversity

What is required to protect our high-quality environments and help to deliver nature recovery?

Theme 4: Protecting Landscapes, Townscapes and Heritage

How can we protect our unique heritage, natural and town landscapes?

What aspects of the borough's heritage matter most to you, how it can be protected, and how it should shape sustainable development into the future?

Theme 5: Transport and Connectivity

Do you find it easy to move around freely and get to where you want to go?

Theme 6: Right Infrastructure in the Right Places

What new infrastructure, services and facilities do we need to plan for and where?

Theme 7: Meeting our Housing Needs and Delivering the Right Types of Housing

What type of homes do need and where do we need them?

Do you think it is better to deliver housing in one go or phased, so that new facilities and infrastructure can be provided? Should we have smaller sites so the new housing can be accommodated within the existing community?

Theme 8: Securing Economic Prosperity

How do we attract more investment and jobs into the Borough?

Engagement

Are there any community groups or local groups you think we should be talking to? If so, please provide details.

How can I have my say on this consultation document?

This consultation is an early engagement exercise intended to inform the scope, evidence base and strategic direction of the Local Plan. It does not constitute publication of a draft plan for the purposes of submission, examination or adoption.

Consultation on the new Local Plan 2025-2045: Scoping the Issues and Early Participation will take place between 8 June and 28 July 2026. Please provide any responses by 12 noon on Tuesday 28 July 2026.

We strongly encourage responses to be made using the pro-forma available on the Council's website at <https://www.staffordbc.gov.uk/Strategic-Planning-and-Placemaking-consultations> and emailing completed forms to strategicplanningconsultations@staffordbc.gov.uk

Alternatively, if you choose to use e-mail please identify the question, section or page number to which your comments refer.

How will my comments be used?

We will acknowledge receipt of your comments and fully consider responses for the next stage of the plan-making process, although the Council will not engage through individual correspondence. All comments received will be published on the Council's website in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulations (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018. Personal data will be processed on the lawful basis that it is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest and in the exercise of official authority.

Protecting Your Privacy

We believe you should always know what data we collect from you and how we use it, and that you should have meaningful control over both. As part of our ongoing commitment to transparency, and in relation to the General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018, we have updated our Privacy Policy.

We will only use your personal information to send you information on the Local Plan and associated planning policy matters. You can find information about how we handle your personal data by visiting www.staffordbc.gov.uk/privacynotices and if you have any queries or would like to unsubscribe from receiving information please contact the Strategic Planning and Placemaking team using the details above.

Stafford Borough New Local Plan 2025 - 2045

Sustainability Appraisal (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Scoping Report 2026

1. Non-technical summary

This non-technical summary introduces the Development Plan, Sustainability Appraisal including Strategic Environmental Assessment, and highlights the main outcomes of the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report.

The purpose of this Scoping Report is to provide the context for, and determine the scope of, the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of the Stafford Borough New Local Plan 2025-2045, and to set out the framework for assessing the sustainability of the new Development Plan.

It will incorporate the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the new Local Plan. For the purposes of this report, we refer to the SA of the Stafford Borough New Local Plan, which should be taken as incorporating SEA.

SA is an assessment process designed to consider and report upon the significant sustainability issues and effects of emerging plans and policies, including their reasonable alternatives.

2. The Plan Area

Stafford Borough Council adopted the Plan for Stafford Borough 2011-2031 on the 19 June 2014. The adopted Local Plan sets out the Council's vision and strategy for Stafford Borough up to 2031. It sets out policies and allocates land for specific uses including housing, employment and retail development. It also sets out the criteria for determining planning applications and guides the decision-making process.

The Council is required to review the Local Plan within five years of its adoption. In July 2017 the Council carried out its Local Plan Review when a consultation on the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report took place. Subsequently the Local Plan 2020-2040 Issues and Options consultation took place in February to April 2020 followed by the Preferred Options (Regulation 18) consultation which occurred between October 2022 to December 2022. However, following the new requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in December 2024 Cabinet took the decision on 6 March 2025, to stop work on the Local Plan 2020-2040 and begin investigation of and to develop a new Local Plan 2025 to 2045 through the new plan-making process.

The new Local Plan 2025-2045 will replace the existing Local Plan documents. The Local Plan will be a borough-wide plan that will coordinate the development and growth requirements of the Borough over a period of 20 years. The Council is at an early stage in the development of the new Local Plan.

3. Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires Local Plans to be subject to an SA. The SA is designed to ensure that the plan preparation process

maximises the contribution that a plan makes to sustainable development and minimises any potential adverse impacts. The SA process involves appraising the likely environmental, social and economic effects of the policies and proposals within a plan from the outset of its development.

The SEA is also a statutory assessment process, originally required under the European SEA Directive, transposed in the UK by the SEA Regulations and amended by the Environmental Assessments and Miscellaneous Planning (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018 (SI 2018/1232). No substantive changes were made by this instrument to the way the SEA regime currently operates. Therefore, the SEA Regulations remain in force, and it is a legal requirement for the Stafford Borough Local Plan to be subject to SA and SEA throughout its preparation.

Whilst the SEA and SA are separate processes both have similar aims and objectives. Simply put, SEA focuses on the likely environmental effects of a plan whilst SA focuses on the social and economic effects of a plan, in addition to the environment.

The Government's Planning Practice Guidance shows how it is possible to satisfy both requirements by undertaking a joint SA and SEA process, and to present an SA Report that incorporates the requirements of the SEA Regulations.

The SA process comprises of five stages, with scoping being Stage A as shown below:

- **Stage A:** Setting the context and objectives, establishing the baseline and deciding the scope.
- **Stage B:** Developing and refining options and assessing effects.
- **Stage C:** Preparing the Sustainability Appraisal Report
- **Stage D:** Consulting on the Local Plan and the SA Report.
- **Stage E:** Monitoring the significant effects of implementing the Local Plan.

Through the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023, the Government secured powers to bring forward a new domestic framework to replace the current Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) and SEA environmental assessment regimes.

Environmental Outcomes Reports (EORs) is a new environmental assessment method that is currently being developed and will replace SAs, SEAs and EIAs. Guidance issued to date states that until a new system is implemented, current legislation on environmental assessment and its supporting guidance continues to apply. Any changes to the legal framework for carrying out SA/SEA will be addressed appropriately as the Local Plan is prepared, and documented as required in either subsequent SA Reports or Environmental Outcomes Reports.

Approach to scoping

The main tasks associated with the scoping stage of the SA (Stage A) are as follows:

- **Stage A1:** Setting out the policy context for the SA of the Local Plan, i.e. key policies and strategies that influence what the Local Plan and the SA need to consider.
- **Stage A2:** Setting out the baseline for the SA of the Local Plan, i.e. the current and environmental, social, and economic conditions in Stafford Borough and their likely evolution in the absence of the new Local Plan.
- **Stage A3:** Drawing on A1 and A2, identify the sustainability problems and/or opportunities ('issues') that the Local Plan and SA should address.
- **Stage A4:** Drawing on A1, A2 and A3, develop a framework of SA objectives and assessment criteria against which to appraise the constituent parts of the Local Plan in isolation and in combination.
- **Stage A5:** Consulting on the intended scope and level of detail of the SA.

This Scoping Report sets out the intended scope and level of detail of the SA of the Local Plan for consultation with the relevant environmental authorities. It fulfils the requirements set out above and provides the foundations for appraisal of the likely effects of constituent parts of the Local Plan, as plan-making progresses. In accordance with the Government's Planning Practice Guidance on SA/SEA, the Scoping Report is proportionate and relevant to the Local Plan, focusing on what is needed to assess likely significant effects. It also takes account of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the emphasis it places on achieving sustainable development.

Structure of the Scoping Report

Table 1 below signposts the relevant sections of the Scoping Report that are considered to meet the SEA Regulations requirements (the remainder will be met during subsequent stages of the SA of the Stafford Borough Local Plan).

Table 1 Meeting the requirements of the SEA Regulations

SEA Regulations requirements	Covered in this Scoping Report?
Environmental report	
Where an environmental assessment is required by any provision of Part 2 of these Regulations, the responsible authority shall prepare, or secure the preparation of, an environmental report in accordance with paragraphs (2) and (3) of this regulation. The report shall identify, describe and evaluate the likely significant effects on the environment of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • implementing the plan or programme; and • reasonable alternatives taking into account the objectives and geographical scope of the plan or programme. (Regulation 12(1) and (2) and Schedule 2). 	The full SA Report produced to accompany the Stafford Borough New Local Plan 2025-2045 will constitute the 'environmental report' and will be produced at a later stage in the SA process.
An outline of the contents and main objectives of the plan or programme, and of its relationship with other relevant plans and programmes.	These requirements are addressed in relation to each topic covered in

The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan or programme.	Chapters 4 to 6 of this SA Scoping Report and subsequent SA reports.
The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected.	
Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan or programme including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance, such as areas designated pursuant to Directives 79/409/EEC on the conservation of wild birds and the Habitats Directive.	
The environmental protection, objectives, established at international, Community or Member State level, which are relevant to the plan or programme and the way those objectives and any environmental, considerations have been taken into account during its preparation.	
The likely significant effects on the environment, including short, medium and long-term effects, permanent and temporary effects, positive effects, and secondary, cumulative and synergistic effects, on issues such as: (a) biodiversity; (b) population; (c) human health; (d) fauna; (e) flora; (f) soil; (g) water; (h) air; (i) climatic factors; (j) material assets; (k) cultural heritage, including architectural and archaeological heritage; (l) landscape; and (m) the interrelationship between the issues referred to in sub-paragraphs (a) to (l).	Requirement will be met at a later stage in the SA process. Chapters 6 to 8 of this SA Scoping Report describes the method by which significant effects will be identified.
The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the plan or programme.	Requirement will be met at a later stage in the SA process.
An outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with, and a description of how the assessment was undertaken including any difficulties (such as technical deficiencies or lack of know-how) encountered in compiling the required information.	
A description of the measures envisaged concerning monitoring in accordance with regulation 17.	
A non-technical summary of the information is provided.	
The report shall include such of the information referred to in Schedule 2 to these Regulations as may reasonably be required, taking account of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • current knowledge and methods of assessment; 	This SA Scoping Report and the 'environmental report' will adhere to this requirement.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the contents and level of detail in the plan or programme; the stage of the plan or programme in the decision-making process; and • the extent to which certain matters are more appropriately assessed at different levels in that process in order to avoid duplication of the assessment. (Regulation 12 (3)) 	
Consultation	
<p>When deciding on the scope and level of detail of the information that must be included in the environmental report, the responsible authority shall consult the consultation bodies. (Regulation 12(5))</p>	<p>This SA Scoping Report will be published for consultation with the three statutory bodies (the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England).</p>
<p>Every draft plan or programme for which an environmental report has been prepared in accordance with Regulation 12 and its accompanying report (“the relevant documents”) shall be made available for the purposes of consultation in accordance with the following provisions of this regulation. As soon as reasonably practical after the preparation of the relevant documents, the responsible authority shall:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • send a copy of those documents to each consultation body; • take such steps as it considers appropriate to bring the preparation of the relevant documents to the attention of the persons who, in the authority’s opinion, are affected or likely to be affected by, or have an interest in the decisions involved in the assessment and adoption of the plan or programme concerned, required under the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Directive (“the public consultees”); • inform the public consultees of the address (which may include a website) at which a copy of the relevant documents may be viewed, and the period within which, opinions must be sent. The period referred to in paragraph (2) (d) must be of such length as will ensure that the consultation bodies and the public consultees are given an effective opportunity to express their opinion on the relevant documents. (Regulation 13 (1), (2), and (3)) 	<p>Public consultation on the Stafford Borough New Local Plan and accompanying SA Reports will take place as the Local Plan develops.</p>
<p>Where a responsible authority, other than the Secretary of State, is of the opinion that a plan or programme for which it is the responsible authority is likely to have significant effects on the environment of another Member State, it shall, as soon as reasonably practicable after forming that opinion:</p>	<p>Unlikely to be relevant to the Stafford Borough Local Plan, as there will be no effects beyond the UK.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • notify the Secretary of State of its opinion and of the reasons for it; and supply the Secretary of State with a copy of the plan or programme concerned, and of the accompanying environmental report. (Regulation 14 (1)) 	
<p>Taking the environmental report and the results of the consultations into account in decision-making (relevant extracts of Regulation 16)</p>	
<p>As soon as reasonably practicable after the adoption of a plan or programme for which an environmental assessment has been carried out under these Regulations, the responsible authority shall: make a copy of the plan or programme and its accompanying environmental report available at its principal office for inspection by the public at all reasonable times and free of charge. (Regulation 16(1))</p>	<p>Requirement will be met at a later stage in the SA process.</p>
<p>The responsible authority shall inform (i) the consultation bodies; (ii) the persons who, in relation to the plan or programme, were public consultees for the purposes of regulation 13; and (iii) where the responsible authority is not the Secretary of State, the Secretary of State,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that the plan or programme has been adopted, and a statement containing the following particulars: • how environmental considerations have been integrated into the plan or programme; • how the environmental report has been taken into account; • how opinions expressed in response to: (i) the invitation in regulation 13(2)(d); (ii) action taken by the responsible authority in accordance with regulation 13(4), have been taken into account; • how the results of any consultations entered into under regulation 14(4) have been taken into account; • the reasons for choosing the plan or programme as adopted, in the light of the other reasonable alternatives dealt with; and • the measures that are to be taken to monitor the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the plan or programme. 	
<p>Monitoring</p>	
<p>The responsible authority shall monitor the significant effects of the implementation of each plan or programme with the purpose of identifying unforeseen adverse effects at an early stage and being able to undertake appropriate remedial action. (Regulation 17(1))</p>	<p>Requirement will be met after adoption of the Stafford Borough New Local Plan 2025-2045.</p>

4. Stafford Borough Local Plan preparation process

Schedule 2 of the SEA Regulations requires the SA Report to provide

"An outline of the contents and main objectives of the plan or programme, and of its relationship with other relevant plans and programmes."

The current Local Plan was adopted 19 June 2014 and comprises of

- The Plan for Stafford Borough
- The Plan for Stafford Borough - Part 2 (adopted 31 January 2017)
- Made/Adopted Neighbourhood Development Plans

In July 2017 the Council carried out its Local Plan Review when a consultation on the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report took place. This was then followed by consultations:

- New Local Plan - Scoping the Issues July 2018 and New Local Plan - Settlement Assessment documents.
- New Local Plan - Issues and Options February to April 2020.
- New Local Plan - Preferred Options October 2022 to December 2022

Following the new requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) December 2024, Cabinet took the decision on 6 March 2025 to stop work on the Local Plan 2020-2040 and begin investigation of and to develop a new Local Plan 2025 to 2045 through the new plan-making process.

The new Local Plan 2025-2045 will replace the existing Local Plan documents. The Local Plan will be a borough-wide plan that will coordinate the development and growth requirements of the Borough over a period of 20 years. The Council is at an early stage in the development of the new Local Plan.

Future plan-making will need to consider changes occurring due to Local Government Reorganisation. The devolution framework sets out that there will be three types of Strategic Authorities (these are all combined authorities):

- **Foundation Strategic Authorities** - non-mayoral Combined Authorities (CA), Level 2 County Combined Authorities (CCA), or any local authorities designated as a Strategic Authority without a mayor.
- **Mayoral Strategic Authorities** - Greater London Authority, Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCA) and Mayoral Combined County Authorities (MCCA).
- **Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities** - any Mayoral Strategic Authorities that meet specific criteria, in particular having had a directly elected mayor for at least 18 months. Initially these will be North East, South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, West Midlands, Greater Manchester and Liverpool City Region Strategic Authorities.

The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill white paper restates the Government's ambition that all areas will ultimately have a Mayoral Strategic Authority. In two-tier areas, Government will only establish CCAs for an interim period. Councils in all 21 two-tier areas will be expected to reorganise over this Parliament and the next.

All areas, regardless of whether they have a Strategic Authority in place, will have to produce a Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) through the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025.

An SDS is a statutory land-use planning document. It will set out an investment framework for building and development across a Strategic Authority's area.

Strategic planning will play a vital role in delivering sustainable growth and addressing key spatial issues – including meeting housing needs, delivering strategic infrastructure, growing the economy, and improving climate resilience. Strategic planning will also be important in the delivery of Local Growth Plans and Local Nature Recovery Strategies. It is the Government's intention to move to a model of universal strategic planning covering functional economic areas within the next five years.

5. Relevant Plans, Programmes and Environmental Objectives

A Development Plan is not prepared in isolation, being greatly influenced by other plans, policies and programmes and by broader sustainability objectives. It needs to be consistent with international, national guidance and strategic planning policies. It should contribute to the goals of a wide range of other programmes and strategies, such as those relating to social policy, culture and heritage. It must also conform to environmental protection legislation and the sustainability objectives established at an international, national and local level.

A review has been undertaken of the other plans, policies and programmes that are relevant to identify the environmental protection, social and economic objectives, established at international, national and local level, which are relevant to the plan or programme. The review of relevant plans, policies and programmes can be seen in full in the Technical Appendices. The key plans, policies and programmes are summarised below.

At the international level, Directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment (the 'SEA Directive') and Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (the 'Habitats Directive') are particularly significant as they require Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) to be undertaken.

There are a wide range of other EU Directives relating to issues such as water quality, waste and air quality, most of which have been transposed into UK law through national-level policy. However the international directives have been included in Technical Appendix for completeness.

In accordance with the UK official SEA guidance (ODPM, 2005), and supported by the UK SA and SEA guidance (updated 2020) which provides an overview of the level of detail required, no list of plans or programmes can be definitive. As a result, this report describes only the key plans, programmes and policies that may influence the Stafford Borough New Local Plan. International, national, regional and local policies, plans and programmes have been reviewed through this sustainability process, as outlined below.

Plans, programmes and policies

The relevant international, national, regional and local plans relevant to Stafford Borough Local Plan and the SA are listed in the Technical Appendix. A description of why they are relevant and how they need to be considered throughout plan development is also provided.

The key environmental, social and economic themes identified by this review, including relevant planning policies outlined within Government's planning policy for England (the NPPF), are shown below:

SA Topic	Key Themes
Environment	
Landscape character	Protection of sensitive landscape assets (including Special Landscape Areas (SLA) and National Landscapes (formerly Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB))); promotion of the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty and amenity of important landscapes, including inland waters; definition and protection of regional and local landscape character; and the provision and enhancement of natural beauty and amenity of important landscapes, including inland waters; and the provision and enhancement of green infrastructure to benefit people and the environment.
Biodiversity and nature conservation	Protection of international and national designated sites and their qualifying features; preservation and enhancement of notable habitats and species, particularly those noted for their conservation value or under threat; protection and enhancement of valued sites of biodiversity and geodiversity value; identification of the roles and responsibilities of organisations including local authorities to protect and enhance biodiversity including the creation of local Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitats and species and promotion of BAP species; provision of new / restored habitat to enable species to adapt to the future impacts of climate change; recognising the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services; and minimising impacts with provision of net gains through development.

Water environment	Promotion of the sustainable use of water resources to meet future growth in demand and impacts of climate change; better regulation and management of the water environment to benefit water resources and flood risk, and the reduction of water pollution; avoidance and redirection of inappropriate development in areas at medium and high risks of flooding; minimise risk to people and property and reduce the impacts of flooding where possible; and promotion of sustainable drainage systems (SuDS).
Land use	Long term protection, improvement and sustainable management of soil quality and quantity, including the preservation of best and most versatile land (Grades 1, 2, and 3a); maximum use of brownfield land as is feasible; optimisation of land to meet housing need; consideration of suitability of ground conditions for development; and the management and remediation of contaminated land to reduce the risk to human health and the environment, particularly soils and water quality.
Historic environment	Protection and enhancement of nationally and locally important heritage assets and historic landscapes; better integration of heritage protection within the planning process; consideration of wider benefits of conservation of the historic environment; and provision of better access to heritage sites including their promotion as an economic asset.
Air Quality	Protection of air quality through enhanced management of polluting emissions; prevention of new and existing development contributing to, being put at risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of air pollution; and implementation of relevant limit values for pollutants such as air quality management areas (AQMAs) and clean air zones.
Climate	Requirements to reduce future greenhouse gas emissions across all socio-economic sectors to limit the impacts of climate change on people and the environment; provision of measures to enable future adaptation to the impacts of climate change and increased resilience; proactive approach to mitigating and adapting to climate change; and consideration of identification of suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy sources and supportive infrastructure where this would help secure their development.
Social	
Population and Human Health	Protection and improvement of human health, wellbeing and living standards; greater integration of socio-economic and environmental objectives to

	deliver sustainable development; promotion of prosperous, sustainable and coherent communities; provision of better public transport and access; reduction of flood risk; enhancement of/minimising loss of recreation and amenity resources to benefit health and wellbeing; protection and enhancement of public rights of way and access; identifying housing requirement; and development and provision of measures to enable adaptation to the impacts of climate change.
Economic	
Local economy	Encourage sustainable economic growth; maximise economic value and the benefits of innovation; encourage economic development through the delivery of sufficient land and tourism development; encourage enterprise, including the creation of new businesses and aiding the growth and development of small businesses; release local growth potential; enable sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas; development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based businesses; tackle worklessness and deprivation; promote links with neighbouring economies to allow the full potential of regional strengths to be recognised.
Material assets	Improvement and better management of material assets including highways and utilities infrastructure; encourage use of sustainable materials including secondary or recycled materials before extraction or primary materials; source materials indigenously; greater provision and enhancement of green infrastructure to delivery benefits to people and the environment; and provision of better public services to deliver socio economic benefits.
Waste and minerals	Sustainable use of mineral resources and improvement in the effects on the environment of their extraction.

Neighbourhood Plans

Neighbourhood Plans, once made/adopted, form part of the development plan for a local authority area. There are six 'made' (adopted) Neighbourhood Plans within Stafford Borough:

- Barlaston Neighbourhood Plan
- Colwich Neighbourhood Plan
- Eccleshall Neighbourhood Plan
- Gnosall Neighbourhood Plan

- Hixon Neighbourhood Plan
- Stone Town Neighbourhood Plan

Key national plans, policies and programmes

Levelling up and Regeneration Act 2023

The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act (LURA) 2023 supports the Government's manifesto commitment to level up the United Kingdom. The Government's objective is to reduce geographical disparities between different parts of the United Kingdom by spreading opportunity more equally.

To support the change needed, the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act has four overarching objectives:

- (a) To place a duty on the Government to set, and report annually on progress towards achieving, levelling up missions to reduce geographical disparities across the United Kingdom;
- (b) To create a framework to support the devolution of powers through the creation of a new model of combined county authorities to support delivery of the Government's levelling up mission that 'by 2030, every part of England that wants one will have a devolution deal with powers at or approaching the highest level of devolution and a simplified, long-term funding settlement' 2 ;
- (c) To deliver new powers for local authorities to regenerate their towns through high street rental auctions and reforms to compulsory purchase to support delivery of the Government's levelling up mission that 'by 2030, pride in place, such as people's satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture and community, will have risen in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing'; and
- (d) To create a planning system which delivers more beautiful and greener homes, with the associated infrastructure and democratic support for neighbourhoods.

The Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025

The primary aim of the Planning and Infrastructure Act (PIA) 2025 is to reform the planning system, removing delays and blockages in planning processes. Key provisions of the Act are:

- (a) **Development Consent Orders (DCOs):** The Act streamlines the DCO process, reducing pre-application requirements and speeding up examination and approval stages.
- (b) **Housing and Infrastructure Delivery:** It facilitates the construction of up to 1.5 million new homes, accelerates major transport projects, and supports clean energy initiatives.
- (c) **Environmental and Land Measures:** Provisions include compulsory land purchase, environmental outcomes reporting, and powers to modify consents for electricity networks and generating stations.
- (d) **Delegation and Planning Committees:** The Act allows the government to introduce a national scheme of delegation, determining which planning

applications are handled by committees versus officers, with mandatory training for committee members to ensure compliance with planning law.

- (e) **Energy and Utilities:** It prioritizes grid connections for clean power projects, supports long-duration electricity storage, and provides benefits for homes near transmission projects.
- (f) **Economic Impact:** The reforms are projected to inject up to £7.5 billion into the UK economy over the next decade, creating jobs, reducing congestion, and improving energy security.

The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) Regulations 2026

These regulations replace the Town and Country Planning Regulations 2012. These regulations implement the new, faster local plan-making system designed to speed up housing delivery. There is a transitional period during 2026 which allows Councils to use either old or new regulations, with the final deadline for old-style plan submissions being 31 December 2026.

National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is the overarching planning framework which provides national planning policy and principles for the planning system in England. The NPPF was originally published in March 2012, and has been revised several times, the latest being December 2024. A further revision is anticipated in the Summer 2026 following the most recent NPPF consultation.

NPPF states that plans should “*be prepared with the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development*” The NPPF also requires Local Plans to be ‘aspirational but realistic’. This means that opportunities for appropriate development should be identified to achieve net gains in terms of sustainable social, environmental and economic development; however significant adverse impacts in any of those areas should not be allowed to occur.

The NPPF requires local planning authorities to set out the strategic priorities for the area in the Local Plan. This should include strategic policies to deliver:

- the homes and jobs needed in the area;
- the provision of retail, leisure and other commercial development;
- the provision of infrastructure for transport, telecommunications, waste management, water supply, wastewater, flood risk and coastal change management, and the provision of minerals and energy (including heat);
- the provision of health, security, community and cultural infrastructure and other local facilities; and
- climate change mitigation and adaptation, conservation and enhancement of the natural and historic environment, including landscape.

In addition, Local Plans should:

- plan positively for the development and infrastructure required in the area to meet the objectives, principles and policies of the Framework;

- be drawn up over an appropriate time scale, preferably a 15-year time horizon, take account of longer term requirements, and be kept up to date;
- be based on co-operation with neighbouring authorities, public, voluntary and private sector organisations;
- indicate broad locations for strategic development on a key diagram and land-use designations on a proposals map;
- allocate sites to promote development and flexible use of land, bringing forward new land where necessary, and provide detail on form, scale, access and quantum of development where appropriate;
- identify areas where it may be necessary to limit freedom to change the uses of buildings, and support such restrictions with a clear explanation;
- identify land where development would be inappropriate, for instance because of its environmental or historic significance; and
- contain a clear strategy for enhancing the natural, built and historic environment, and supporting Nature Improvement Areas where they have been identified.

The overarching nature of the NPPF means that its implications for the SA relate to multiple topics which this report seeks to address. Considering the importance of the NPPF to the English planning system, the relevance of the Framework and its implications for the plan making process and the SA is provided in more detail below. Sustainability topics are separated into environmental, social and economic below, but consideration of issues often cuts across topics.

There are a wide range of plans and programmes that are specific to Stafford Borough. These plans and programmes relate to issues such as housing, transport, renewable energy and green infrastructure, and developer contributions. A review of these documents can be found in the Technical Appendix.

6. Baseline Information

Stafford Borough Council has collected significant data about the current state of the environment, economy and society to assess the effects of implementing the Development Plan from the sustainability perspective.

The following tables provides a selection of baseline data which will be used as the basis for prediction and monitoring of environmental and other sustainability effects to monitor how the sustainability position is improving or deteriorating in relation to the Development Plan. This approach will help to identify issues and alternative ways of dealing with such issues in the future.

The last Census 2021 took place during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, which was a period of unparalleled and rapid change. The national lockdown, associated guidance and furlough measures will have affected the labour market and travel to work topic. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) have advised care should be applied when using this data for planning and policy purposes.

Social, health and wellbeing

Between the last two censuses (held in 2011 and 2021), the population of Stafford Borough increased by 4.6%, from just under 130,900 in 2011 to around 136,900 in 2021. The population here increased by a smaller percentage than the overall population of the West Midlands (6.2%), and by a smaller percentage than the overall population of England (up 6.6% since the 2011 Census). Most of the population of the Borough live within Stafford or Stone, with the remaining percentage of the population living within the rural areas. As of 2021, Stafford Borough is the eighth least densely populated of the West Midlands' 20 local authority areas.¹

Housing

The total population in households in Stafford Borough that the time of the 2021 Census was 134,656, a total of 60,047 households.

39.1% of households in the Borough are owner-occupiers without a mortgage, compared to 34.4% in the region and 32.5% nationally. The proportion of owner-occupiers with a mortgage in Stafford Borough (31.7%) is also higher than both the regional (31.4%) and national average (28.8%).

In Stafford Borough the proportion of households in Shared Ownership accommodation (at 0.8%) is the same as the regional figure but lower than the national equivalent (1.0%). Some 13.6% of households in Stafford Borough are resident in the Social Rented sector, lower than the figure for the West Midlands (18.2%) and England (17.1%). Finally, some 15.5% of households in Stafford Borough live in private rented accommodation, compared to 18.1% in the West Midlands and 20.6% in England.

Gypsy and Travellers

The 2011 Census identified a total of 50 households in Stafford Borough where the Household Reference Person had a 'White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller' ethnicity. Of these, 26 lived in a caravan and 24 in bricks and mortar housing.

Gypsy and Traveller provision includes one council site (9 pitches), seven private authorised sites (94 pitches) and one unauthorised site (5 pitches).

There are no Travelling Showperson's yards in the borough. Private sites tend to be occupied by extended family groups. This means the ability of non-family members to move onto private sites is limited. The bi-annual DCLG Traveller caravan count (Jan 2016 to Jan 2020) reported an average of 84 caravans on Gypsy and Traveller sites and none on Travelling Showperson's yards.

Aging Population

Between the last two Censuses, there has been an increase of 24.6% in people aged 65 years and over, a decrease of 1.7% in people aged 15 to 64 years, and an increase of 4.9% in children aged under 15 years. The average (median) age

¹ Office for National Statistics (2025). How the population changed in Stafford: Census 2021 [Stafford population change, Census 2021 – ONS](#)

of Stafford Borough increased by two years, from 43 to 45 years of age. This area had a higher average (median) age than the West Midlands as a whole in 2021 (40 years) and a higher average (median) age than England (40 years). The number of people aged 75 to 84 years rose by around 3,100 (an increase of 38.9%), while the number of residents between 35 and 49 years fell by just under 3,300 (11.6% decrease).

Health

In 2021, 48.5% of Stafford Borough residents described their health as "very good", increasing from 46.3% in 2011. Those describing their health as "good" fell from 35.5% to 34.5%. These are age-standardised proportions.

The proportion of Stafford Borough residents describing their health as "very bad" was 1.0% (similar to 2011), while those describing their health as "bad" fell from 3.9% to 3.5%.

Census 2021 was conducted during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This may have influenced how people perceived and rated their health, and therefore may have affected how people chose to respond.

Indicators

Social, Health and Wellbeing Baseline Data					
Indicator	Quantified data (for Stafford Borough unless stated)	Comparators and Targets	Assessment / Trend	Issues Identified?	Action / Issues for Plan / SA
Ageing population (percentage aged 65 and over)²	2025 (estimate) 23.2%	2025 (estimate) West Midlands: 18.9% England: 18.7%	Stafford Borough has a relatively high number of residents aged 65 and over compared to the regional and national average	Ageing population	Consider actions which can be taken to cater for an ageing population.
Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)	2025 5.3% of people in the most deprived quartile	West Midlands: 29.9% of people in the most deprived quartile	Stafford Borough has a relatively low percentage of people in the most deprived quartile	Favourable situation against regional and national rankings	Focus on reducing deprivation within communities across the Borough
Statutory homelessness³ (homelessness acceptances per 1000 households)	April 2024 to March 2025 6.1 %	England: 7.5%	Performing well in comparison to the regional and national figures	Favourable position	Focus on reducing homelessness in the Borough
Affordable housing completions¹²	2024 / 2025: 199	Since 2014, Stafford Borough has delivered 2,167 affordable homes. Annual average 2011-2025: 171	Performing well against the Borough's target	Favourable position	Maintain and improve the current position across the Borough

² [Local area data | Staffordshire County Council](#)

³ [Tables on homelessness - GOV.UK](#)

Housing Affordability Ratio (ratio of lower quartile house prices to lower quartile earnings) ⁴	2025 Ratio: 7.46 5 year average: 7.45	England and Wales ratio: 7.55 5 year average: 8.19 Regional average: 6.80	Similar to the national ratio	Neither favourable or unfavourable position	Provide a housing mix to ensure a range of housing
Total recorded crime excl. fraud (rate per 1000)¹⁵	2025: 64.2	West Midlands: 89.8 England: 88.6	Performing well in comparison to the regional and national figures	Favourable position	Maintain and improve the current position across the Borough
Lone pensioner households¹⁵	2025: 13.9%	West Midlands: 13.1% England: 12.8%	Performing slightly worse than the regional and national average	Slightly unfavourable position	Improve the current position across the Borough
Physical activity in adults (percentage)¹⁵	2022/23: 68.4%	West Midlands: 64.0% England: 67.1%	Performing well in comparison to the regional and national figures	Favourable position	Continue to promote physical activity in Stafford Borough
Adults who are overweight or obese¹⁵	2022-23: 63.5%	West Midlands: 67% England: 64.0%	Performing well in comparison to the regional and national figures	Favourable position	Continue to promote physical activity in Stafford Borough
Limiting long-term illness (percentage)¹⁵	2011: 18.2%	West Midlands: 19.0% England: 17.6%	Performing slightly better than the regional average and slightly worse than the national average	Neither favourable or unfavourable condition	Maintain and improve the current position across the Borough

⁴ [Housing affordability in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics](#) (local authority housing affordability analysis)

Mortality from causes considered preventable (ASR per 100,000)¹⁵	2021-2023: 158	Stafford: 136.4 (558) Staffordshire: 152.4 (3,913) West Midlands: 176.8 (27,458) England: 163.7 (243,060)	Performing well against the regional and national average	Favourable position	Maintain and improve the current position across the Borough
Buildings 'at risk'¹⁵	8 buildings were on the 2025 buildings at risk register equating to around 1% of listed buildings in the Borough	Staffordshire: 42 West Midlands : 402	Performing well against the regional average	Favourable position	Maintain and improve the current position across the Borough
Homes with a Housing Health and Safety Rating (HHSRS) hazard	2011: 16% average (Stafford Borough is performing particularly poorly in the excess cold monitor).	England: 15% average	Performing slightly worse than the England average	Slightly unfavourable condition	Need to improve the quality of the Borough's existing and new housing stock
Occupancy rating (bedrooms)⁶	2021: Occupancy rating of bedrooms -2 or less: 90	2021 West Midlands: 4.59 %	Performing well against the regional and national average	Favourable position	Maintain and improve the current position across the Borough

⁵ Historic England – Annual Heritage at Risk Registers and Maps (2025) [Annual Heritage at Risk Registers and Maps | Historic England](#)

⁶ Office for National Statistics Census 2021 [Occupancy rating for bedrooms - Office for National Statistics](#)

Percentage of long term empty homes⁷	2021: Vacant dwellings: 2,495 Second homes: 115 (4.1%)	West Midlands Vacant dwellings: 117,030 Second homes: 5,600 (4.8%)	Performing relatively poorly against the regional average.	Unfavourable condition	Need to improve the current position
Depression prevalence (ages 18+)¹⁵	2022/23: 13.5%	Staffordshire: 14.2% West Midlands: 14% England: 13.2%	The figures are slightly lower than the regional average	Neither favourable or unfavourable position	Continue to work with partners to support mental health across the Borough
Neighbourhood Development Plans¹²	Since 2011: 13 areas designated 6 with 'made' plans	No comparators	No trends	Neither favourable or unfavourable position	Continue to support community groups creating Neighbourhood Development Plans
Number of voluntary organisations registered with Support Staffordshire which deliver in Stafford Borough⁸	April 2017: 161	No comparators available	No trends available	Neither favourable or unfavourable position	Maintain/improve current performance

⁷ Office for National Statistics Census 2021 [Number of vacant dwellings and second homes \(with no usual residents\) - Office for National Statistics](#)

⁸ Support Staffordshire State of the Sector 2023 [State-of-the-Sector-2023-Digital-v1.4.pdf](#)

Economic Baseline Data

Stafford Borough is a major economic hub and has seen significant investment and growth over the last decade with major investors and businesses attracted to the area due to the availability of sites, infrastructure, affordability, and quality of life. The Borough is home to over 5,000 businesses, employing around 70,000 people and is Staffordshire's largest and most populous borough covering around 230 square miles and with a population of 138,670. Stafford town is the borough's principal town and main provider of services, facilities, employment and transport links. Stone is an important market town and second principal town and main provider of services, facilities, employment and transport links.

The Stafford Borough Economic Growth Strategy 2020-2025 is to be refreshed during 2026-2027.

In 2021 the percentage of people aged 16 years and over in Stafford Borough who were employed (excluding full-time students) decreased from 57.4% in 2011 to 56.4% in 2021. During the same period, the percentage in nearby South Staffordshire decreased from 57.5% to 53.3%.

The percentage of people aged 16 years and over who were unemployed (excluding full-time students) in Stafford Borough fell from 2.8% to 2.0%, while the percentage of people aged 16 years and over who were retired (economically inactive) increased from 24.7% to 27.2%.

Work patterns changed during the pandemic with 25.2% of Staffordshire residents said that they worked mainly at or from home, lower than national (31.5%) but slightly higher than the overall former Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) area (23.1%). This is likely impacted by more people working in sectors where home working was not possible, for example retail and construction.

Indicators

Economic Baseline Data					
Indicator	Quantified data (for Stafford Borough unless stated)	Comparators and Targets	Assessment/Trend	Issues Identified?	Action / Issues for Plan / SA
Qualifications NVQ Level 4 or above (percentage)⁹	2025 NVQ 21.9% <i>No qualifications:</i> 19.3%	NVQ : West Midlands: 29.4% Great Britain: 33.9% <i>No qualifications:</i> West Midlands: 21.1% Great Britain: 18.1%	Performing well against the regional and national average	Favourable position	Maintain good performance
Number of enterprises¹⁰	2025 5,370	West Midlands: 216,145	Performing below the national and regional average	Favourable/Unfavourable position	Improve upon current position

⁹ Staffordshire Observatory - [Local area data](#) | [Staffordshire County Council](#)

¹⁰ UK Business Counts 2025 [Labour Market Profile - Nomis - Official Census and Labour Market Statistics](#)

Number of enterprises local units¹¹	2025 6,350	West Midlands: 252,320			
Completion of land employment provision¹²	Hectares (ha) completed 2024/25: 0.7 ha Annual average between 2011-2025: 8.1 ha	The Plan for Stafford Borough 2011-2031 set an annual target of 8 ha	Employment land completions have been below the annual target per year (apart from 2022/23)	Unfavourable position	Need to deliver more employment land across the Borough
Percentage of vacant retail units (Stafford Town Centre)¹³	Dec 2016 Stafford Town Centre: 14%	England: 11%	Performing poorly against the national average	Unfavourable position	Deliver ways to reduce vacant units in town centre
Percentage of retail, leisure and office developments which have been in the Town Centres¹²	2023/24: 30% 2024/25: 0% As of 2024/25 only 8% of commitments (sites with permission but not yet built) are within town centres	Target: Maximise developments in the town centres	Performing poorly	Unfavourable position	Deliver ways to reduce vacant units in town centre

¹¹ UK Business Counts 2025 [Labour Market Profile - Nomis - Official Census and Labour Market Statistics](#)

¹² Stafford Borough Authority Monitoring Report 2025 [Authority Monitoring Report 2025](#)

¹³ Stafford Borough Council data / Local Data Company

Job Seekers Allowance (percentage) ¹⁴	Feb 2026 2.5%	West Midlands: 5.3% England: 1.9%	Stafford Borough is performing well compared to the regional and national average	Favourable position	Maintain strong performance
Dependency ratio of older people per 100 working age population ¹⁵	2025: 38.6%	West Midlands: 30.6% England: 29.7%	Stafford Borough has a higher ratio of dependent older people than the regional and national average	Unfavourable position	Improve current position
Youth unemployment (185-24 claimant counts) ¹⁵	December 2024: 4.8%	Staffordshire: 4.8% West Midlands: 7.4%	Stafford Borough is performing well compared to the regional and national average	Slightly favourable position	Maintain strong performance

¹⁴ Nomis - [Labour Market Profile - Nomis - Official Census and Labour Market Statistics](#)

¹⁵ Staffordshire Observatory – Stafford: Locality Profile

Environmental Baseline Data

A desk study was performed to identify the key baseline environmental, social, and economic characteristics of Stafford Borough. This includes details of the status and condition of notable environmental features; current and future predicted trends in evolution of the environment, social and economic aspects; and issues and problems currently affecting the environment and population.

The information obtained is set out in the following topic-specific sections, many of which are interlinked. The information used to characterise the baseline environment is broadly strategic in nature and reflects the high-level nature of the Local Plan. It has been obtained from a broad range of sources and no new investigations or surveys have been undertaken as part of the scoping process. The baseline information will be required throughout the SA process and may require updating as the Local Plan is developed and further and new information becomes available.

Landscape

Landscape character

There are 4 National Character Areas (NCA) within the Borough described by Natural England¹⁶ below:

¹⁶ Natural England – National Character Area Profiles (2026) [Natural England - National Character Area Profiles - National Character Area Profiles](#)

National Character Area	Summary	Key Characteristics
<p>NCA 61 Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plain</p>	<p>An expanse of flat or gently undulating, lush, pastoral farmland, which is bounded by the Mersey Valley NCA in the north, with its urban and industrial development, and extending to the rural Shropshire Hills NCA in the south. To the west, it is bounded by the hills of the Welsh borders and to the east and south-east by the urban areas within the Potteries and Churnet Valley, Needwood and South Derbyshire Claylands, and Cannock Chase and Cank Wood NCAs.</p>	<p>Extensive, gently undulating plain, dominated by thick glacial till from the late Pleistocene Period, producing productive, clay soils and exemplifying characteristic glacial landforms including eskers, glacial fans, kettle holes, moraines and a landscape of meres and mosses.</p> <p>Prominent discontinuous sandstone ridges of Triassic age, characterised by steep sides and freely draining, generally infertile soil that supports broadleaved and mixed woodland.</p> <p>Few woodlands, confined to the area around Northwich and to estates, cloughs and deciduous and mixed woods on the steeper slopes of the wind-swept sandstone ridges. Locally extensive tracts of coniferous woodland and locally distinctive orchards scattered throughout.</p> <p>Strong field patterns with generally well-maintained boundaries, predominantly hedgerows, with dense, mature hedgerow trees. Sandstone walls occur on the ridges and estate walls and Cheshire-style (curved topped) metal railing fences occur locally on estates in Cheshire.</p> <p>Dairy farming dominates on the plain, with patches of mixed farming and arable in the north and large areas in the south-east.</p> <p>Diversity of wetland habitats includes internationally important meres and mosses comprising lowland raised bog, fen, wet woodland, reedbed and standing water, supporting populations of a host of rare wildlife, including some species of national and international importance.</p> <p>Extensive peat flood plains where flood plain grazing marsh habitats support regionally important populations of breeding waders in areas such as Baggy Moor, Weald Moor and Doxey Marshes.</p>

		<p>Many main rivers and their flood plains lie in this area, including the Dee, Dane, Severn, Penk and Sow. Significant areas of grazing marsh, alluvial flood meadows and hay meadows associated with the rivers Dee, Sow, Gowy and Severn. The area has the highest density of field ponds in western Europe.</p> <p>Rich archaeological evidence of iron-age hill forts concentrated on the sandstone ridges and the Weald Moors. Remnant ridge and furrow and moated houses are features of the plain. The Roman road, Watling Street, crosses the plain linking London to Wales via Wroxeter. Chester was an important Roman settlement.</p> <p>Regularly spaced, large farmsteads, dispersed hamlets, market towns and many other settlements including Macclesfield and Telford. Timber-frame buildings are a distinctive feature of the plain, often highly decorated in Cheshire, for example, the moated Little Moreton Hall. The historic towns including Stafford, Shrewsbury and the city of Chester have a wealth of 17th- and 18th-century half-timber, brick and red sandstone buildings.</p> <p>Parklands and gardens associated with estates such as Chillington, Trentham, Tatton and Attingham; country houses such as Gawsworth Hall, Arley Hall and Adlington Hall; and fortified manor houses and castles such as at Shrewsbury, Stafford, Beeston, Acton Burnell and Cholmondeley.</p> <p>Nationally important reserves of silica sand and salt. Active extraction of salt has developed a locally distinctive landscape of subsidence flashes, particularly around the area of Sandbach. Adjacent to these saline flashes are areas of salt marsh rarely found at inland sites.</p> <p>The numerous canals are important for recreation as well as habitat. Several National Cycle Routes and nearly 5,000 km of public rights of way</p>
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		<p>cross the plain. Six National Nature Reserves (NNRs) are scattered throughout, close to large population centres and well used for recreation.</p>
<p>NCA 64 Potteries and Churnet Valley</p>	<p>A strong contrast between the industrialised landscape of the Potteries and the pastoral, strongly dissected hills and small plateaux that flank the Churnet and Dove valleys. Natural resources associated with the Coal Measures enabled industrial development leading to the settlement patterns of the Potteries, which form a large conurbation. There is a rich industrial heritage associated with manufacturing, particularly of pottery and the mining of coal, clay, minerals and metal ores, which contributes strongly to the sense of place.</p>	<p>Dissected hills and small plateaux, cut by river valleys and steep ravines, contrast with the industrial and densely settled conurbation of the Potteries.</p> <p>Sandstones from the Millstone Grit Group and Coal Measures produce prominent, roughly north–south ridges. Softer mudstones with poorly drained and seasonally waterlogged soils and peaty soils form the intervening moorland plateaux, and mudstones and siltstones from the Triassic Mercia Mudstone Group underlie the generally lower-lying ground on the margins of the Needwood Basin.</p> <p>The well-wooded character throughout the Churnet Valley contrasts strongly with the urban, sparsely wooded landscapes of the Potteries. Many of the woodlands in the south consist of conifer plantations managed for commercial forestry.</p> <p>Deep, fast-flowing rivers Churnet, Trent, Dove and their tributaries drain the area. Riffles, scour ponds, subsidence pools and numerous small ponds provide ecological connectivity.</p> <p>Hedgerow banks with hedgerow oaks confine small pastures in the Churnet Valley; in the north, hedgerows are gappy and hedgerow trees are few. At higher elevations, drystone walls replace hedgerows and fields are larger and rectilinear.</p> <p>Agriculture is predominantly permanent pasture for grazing and stock rearing with some dairying; flatter areas are used for silage production and some arable cropping in the south, mainly cereals.</p>

		<p>Ancient semi-natural woodland occurs predominantly in the valleys with grasslands and grazing marsh within valley bottoms, especially the lower reaches of the Churnet and in the Dove Valley; there is heathland on higher ground and significant areas of open mosaic habitat on restored industrial land within urban areas.</p> <p>There is a rich heritage associated with iron production, coal mining, silk production and, most notably, pottery; the area is characterised by industrial and residential development in the Potteries and waterpowered flint mills and foundries in the Churnet Valley, linked by historic trade routes.</p> <p>Historic heathland habitats remain with their smallholdings – rare surviving examples of rural–industrial landscapes.</p> <p>Historic parklands are characterised by woodland belts enclosing grassland with parkland trees and avenues with vistas. Some ancient wood pastures and squatter enclosures occur – once a common feature of the landscape, they provided shelter, pasture and fodder for livestock.</p> <p>Red brick manufactured from the local Etruria Marl and sandstone from the Coal Measures are predominantly used as building materials in lowland areas; Millstone Grit is used in upland areas in farmhouses and drystone walls. Plain clay and large numbers of Staffordshire blue tiles or Welsh slate are used for roofing.</p> <p>There is a contrast between the settlement pattern of valley-bottom villages with scattered farmsteads and hamlets on the valley slopes in the east and the sprawling conurbation of the Potteries in the west.</p>
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		<p>Major transport infrastructure includes several A roads (A34, A50 and A52) and the Stoke-on-Trent to London railway. The Caldon Canal and Trent and Mersey Canal link the conurbation with the Churnet Valley.</p> <p>The Sabrina Way, a section of the National Cycle Network and the Staffordshire Way pass through the area. Alton Towers is the most popular tourist destination in the NCA, together with a number of parks and gardens and pottery visitor centres.</p>
<p>NCA 67 Cannock Chase and Cank Wood</p>	<p>A varied landscape ranging from the open heathlands and plantations of Cannock Chase including the Special Area of Conservation (SAC), through towns, reclaimed mining sites and new developments, to dense urban areas. Extensive coniferous plantations, woodlands and historic parklands occur across the NCA, even within the urban areas where they are predominantly small and include lots of young plantations.</p>	<p>A varied landscape ranging from the open heathlands and plantations of Cannock Chase, through towns, reclaimed mining sites and new developments, to dense urban areas.</p> <p>The dominant rounded central plateau is mainly formed of the Coal Measures of the South Staffordshire Coalfield, with other prominent hills in the south at Wren’s Nest, Castle Hill, Rowley Hills and Barr Beacon.</p> <p>Extensive coniferous plantations, woodlands and historic parklands occur across the NCA, even within the urban areas where they are predominantly small and include lots of young plantations.</p> <p>Away from the unenclosed landscape of Cannock Chase, fields generally have a regular pattern and are frequently enclosed by mature hedgerows with some hedgerow trees. Here farming is generally mixed with arable cultivation in large fields. Livery is concentrated around the flanks of the Chase.</p> <p>Heathland and associated acid grassland were once much more extensive, although significant tracts still remain. Post-industrial sites and remnant countryside within the urban areas provide a mosaic of additional valuable habitats.</p>

		<p>The major rivers of the Trent and Tame lie adjacent to the NCA, both of which lie in broad flood plains. Streams and small rivers such as the Sow and the Penk drain radially from the higher ground into these rivers.</p> <p>The canal network is a notable feature and contributes significantly to the drainage of the urban areas.</p> <p>Industrial archaeology from the industrial revolution is a characteristic feature.</p> <p>The predominant building material of the 19th- and early 20thcentury buildings is red brick, with more modern structures within the urban areas.</p> <p>The settlement pattern is complex and contrasting, with some areas densely populated and others relatively sparse. The conurbation includes a mosaic of urban areas, former industrial land and patches of farmland, with an extensive urban fringe.</p> <p>The extensive networks of canals and railways reflect the industrial history of the area. Major roads include the M6, the M6 Toll and the A5.</p>
<p>NCA 68 Needwood and South Derbyshire Claylands</p>	<p>Predominately a rolling plateau that slopes from the southern edge of the Peak District to the valley of the River Trent in the south-west. Also in the south are frequent plantations and ancient woodlands of the former Forest of Needwood. Elsewhere, the</p>	<p>The area, which is dissected by the river systems of the Trent, the Blithe and the Dove, forms a rolling glacial till plateau that slopes south-eastwards from the southern edge of the Peak District to the valley of the River Trent. There is a distinctive scarp to the south of the Dove, whose broad flood plain divides the Staffordshire and Derbyshire elements.</p> <p>The south is dominated by heavy, seasonally waterlogged soils derived from glacial till. In the north, red and pink soils underlain by Mercia Mudstones and Sherwood Sandstone are more amenable to cultivation.</p>

	<p>extensively hedged and pastoral landscape is dominated by mixed farming and features a dispersed pattern of villages and other settlements. Hedgerow trees also contribute to the wooded character of this NCA. Internationally important wetland habitats that include Chartley Moss and Pasturefields Saltmarsh nature reserves occur in the west of the area. Part of the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site and The National Forest are situated on the eastern side of the NCA. To the north and west respectively are found small parts of the Peak District National Park and Cannock Chase National Landscape (former Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty).</p>	<p>A predominantly pastoral landscape of rolling countryside that is still largely rural and relatively tranquil, featuring distinctive field boundary patterns and characteristic hedgerows with hedgerow trees. Grassland for livestock is the dominant land use although dairy and cereal farming are also important. The majority of the farms are small to medium-sized dairying and livestock holdings. Arable cultivation occurs on the better land north and south of the Dove and in the river flood plains.</p> <p>An overall wooded character derived from scattered ancient and seminatural woods, parkland and boundary trees. Some large woodland blocks are prominent in Needwood Forest; however, much consists of smaller, fragmented remnants. There is new woodland creation within The National Forest.</p> <p>Predominantly hedgerow bounded, the field pattern varies from small to medium-sized fields to the north of the Dove; mostly large-scale and rectilinear on the broad river flood plains; strongly rectilinear in Needwood Forest; and smaller and more irregular to the west.</p> <p>A wide range of habitats associated predominantly with pasture, varying from damp lowland grassland and marshland to drier neutral grassland. There are good surviving examples of water meadows featured along the three main river valleys. Areas of open water such as Blithfield Reservoir and the major rivers are important for birds. Chartley Moss (a basin mire) and Pasturefields (an inland salt marsh) are internationally important examples of rare habitats.</p> <p>Wood pasture and designed parklands, often with veteran trees, are found throughout the area. They are generally associated with landscape parks and country houses, such as Sandon, Sudbury and Kedleston. Tutbury Castle and the internationally important Derwent Valley Mills, together with a variety of features such as moated sites and medieval settlements and</p>
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		<p>the Trent and Mersey Canal, add to the historical richness of this landscape. Extensive earthworks relating to ridge and furrow and water meadow systems survive, particularly around the Dove.</p> <p>A dispersed historical settlement pattern, particularly in the higher pastoral farmlands that fringe the Peak District to the north, with the older villages generally sited along the valleys or valley sides, and more recent crossroad settlements on the higher ground. Buildings are usually of red brick and clay tile roofs, and local sandstone. Timber frame buildings are rare with notable examples at Somersal Hall and the village of Abbots Bromley. There are market towns at Ashbourne, Stone, Tutbury and Uttoxeter, and the more significant urban areas of Burton-upon-Trent and the City of Derby extend into the eastern boundary of the NCA.</p> <p>The Trent and Dove valleys are major transport corridors. The Trent Valley includes the Trent and Mersey Canal, the West Coast Main Line railway and the A51 road, while the Dove Valley features the Derby to Stoke railway line and the A50 road. The A52 links Derby and Ashbourne.</p>
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Landscape designations and biodiversity

Landscape designations

There are two areas of designated Green Belt within the Borough. Less than a quarter of the Borough area is identified as Green Belt designation, located to the south east of Stafford as part of the West Midlands Green Belt Area (1,810 ha) and to the north of Stone forming part of the North Staffordshire Green Belt Area (9,266 ha).

The Green Belt area to the north of Stafford Borough acts as a buffer to prevent unrestricted growth of the North Staffordshire conurbation, and to assist in focusing urban regeneration within the conurbation through encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

The Green Belt area to the south east of Stafford Borough supports national objectives by assisting in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. In terms of the national objectives, the Green Belt area to the south and east of Stafford Borough also provides opportunities for access to the open countryside for the urban population, retains and enhances attractive landscapes near to where people live and secures nature conservation interests.

Historic Parks and Gardens

A register of historic parks and gardens is kept by English Heritage. Currently four within Stafford Borough are on the Statutory Register;

- Shugborough (Grade I)
- Trentham Gardens(Grade II*)
- Sandon Park(Grade II); and
- German Military Cemetery on Cannock Chase (Grade II*).

Biodiversity

Within Stafford Borough, approximately 296 ha of land is designated as Ramsar sites and 1,001 ha has Special Area of Conservation (SAC) status, including on Cannock Chase. The Borough has one designated landscape. Cannock Chase was designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1958 because of its beautiful landscape, its wildlife and its history. From November 2023 it has been renamed as a National Landscape.

Cannock Chase is the largest surviving area of lowland heathland in the Midlands. Lowland heath is an internationally scarce and threatened wildlife habitat. The National Landscape also has extensive areas of forest and woodland along with areas of designed parkland, sand and gravel quarrying and mixed agriculture. A large northern section of the National Landscape lies within the Stafford Borough boundary.

Stafford Borough Council along with Natural England and four other local authorities (Cannock Chase Council, Lichfield District Council, South Staffordshire Council and Staffordshire County Council) fund and support the work of the Cannock Chase

Natural Landscape Unit and implementation of the Cannock Chase National Landscape Management Plan through the Joint Committee and Officer Working Group. Additional work on specific projects is carried out by a range of National Landscape partners.

Stafford Borough is also a member of the Cannock Chase SAC Partnership comprising Local Authorities, landowners including Staffordshire County Council and advisory bodies such as Natural England and the NL team to develop and deliver a mitigation strategy for the impacts of recreation on the SAC.

The Borough has diverse ecological assets including:

- 16 sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs);
- 3 Ramsar sites (Chartley Moss, Aqualate Mere, and Motte Meadows) which is an international designation of wetlands designated by UNESCO;
- 4 Special Areas of Conservation (SACs);
- 2 National Nature Reserves; and
- 173 sites identified locally as Sites of Biological Importance (SBIs).

Indicators

Indicator	Quantified data (for Stafford Borough unless stated)	Comparators and Targets	Assessment/Trend	Issues Identified?	Action / Issues for Plan / SA
Housing completions on Previously Developed Land (PDL) (percentage) ¹⁷	2024/25: 24%	Average 2011/12 to 2024/25: 39%	Decreasing percentage of housing completions on PDL	Unfavourable condition	Continue to maximise Housing completions on PDL
Woodland access % of population with access to a 2ha+ wood within 500m ¹⁸	2022: 13.59%	England 16%	Performing poorly against regional average.	Unfavourable condition	Need to provide more woodland access

¹⁷ Stafford Borough Council Land for New Homes (2025) [Land for New Homes](#)

¹⁸ Office for National Statistics Census 2021 [Woodland natural capital accounts, UK - Office for National Statistics](#)

Travel to work ¹⁹	2022 Car / Van: 35,046 Bicycle: 1300 On foot: 4851	Staffordshire: Car / Van: 240,040 Bicycle: 5,617 On foot: 27,741 West Midlands: Car/Van: 1,396,152 Bicycle: 38,436 On foot: 185,913	Performing well against the County average	Favourable position	Continue to promote more sustainable modes of travel
Percentage of household waste ²⁰	2016 52.4%	England: 43%	Performing well against national average	Favourable position	Maintain / improve current performance
Developer contributions to the Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation (SAC) ¹²	2024/25: £1,781,955.56 has been collected and is available to spend post 1 April 2025.	No comparators	No trends	Continue to collect contributions to protect and enhance the SAC	Maintain / improve current performance

¹⁹ Office for National Statistics Census 2021 [Method used to travel to work - Office for National Statistics](#)

²⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/env18-local-authority-collected-waste-annual-results-tables>

Local Sites in positive conservation management ²¹	Stafford Borough (2016) 186	Staffordshire ²² (2025) 2008/09: 30% 2024/25: 58%	Increasing number of SBIs in conservation management	Favourable condition	Continue to increase the number of SBIs in conservation management
Quality of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) ²³	Most recent data available for each site as of May 2017 13 out of 17 SSSIs had 95% of their area in a 'favourable' or 'unfavourable recovering' condition ²⁴	Data Compiled in 2014 14 out of 17 SSSIs had 95% of their area in a 'favourable' or 'unfavourable recovering' condition	Slightly reduction in the number of SSSIs meeting the 95% threshold	Slightly unfavourable condition	Enhance the quality of SSSIs in the Borough

²¹ Staffordshire Wildlife Trust. The State of Staffordshire's Nature (2016) [State of Staffs technical report compressed.pdf](#)

²² Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (2026) [Local sites in positive conservation management - GOV.UK](#)

²³ Natural England <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/SiteSearch.aspx>

²⁴ Includes all SSSIs within or partially within the Borough boundary

<p>Water quality²⁵</p>	<p>Trent Valley Staffordshire (2019)</p> <p>41 water bodies:</p> <p>4 = bad</p> <p>22 = poor</p> <p>14 = moderate</p> <p>1 = good</p> <p>Chemical status for surface waters:</p> <p>Number of water bodies = 41</p> <p>41 = fail</p> <p>0 = good</p>	<p>Humber River Basin (2019)²⁶</p> <p>982 water bodies:</p> <p>27= bad</p> <p>159= poor</p> <p>646 = moderate</p> <p>150 = good</p> <p>Chemical status for surface waters:</p> <p>Number of water bodies = 982</p> <p>982 = fail</p> <p>0 = good</p>	<p>Poor ecological status compared to the wider area</p> <p>Chemical status is similar to the wider area</p>	<p>Unfavourable condition</p> <p>Favourable position</p>	<p>Consider ways to enhance the ecological status of waterways in the Borough</p>
<p>Noise complaints²⁷</p>	<p>2016: 460</p>	<p>2015: 517 2014: 630</p> <p>2013:740</p>	<p>Number of noise complaints across the Borough are decreasing</p>	<p>Maintain / improve current performance</p>	<p>Continue to address causes of noise pollution</p>

²⁵ Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs: Environment Agency [Trent Valley Staffordshire Management Catchment | Catchment Data Explorer](#)

²⁶ Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs: Environment Agency [Humber River Basin District | Catchment Data Explorer](#)

²⁷ Stafford Borough Council Data

Light pollution complains ²⁸	2016: 6	2015: 5 2014: 12 2013: 8	The number of light pollution complaints have generally decreased	Maintain / improve current performance	Continue to address causes of light pollution
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²⁸ Stafford Borough Council Data

7. Key Sustainability Issues and Opportunities

The purpose of the scoping stage is to focus the SA on the sustainability issues which are relevant to the New Local Plan 2025-2045. The assessment will focus on those effects that are likely to be significant, whether positive or negative.

In accordance with Schedule 2 of the SEA Regulations, the SEA must consider the "likely significant effects on the environment, including short, medium, and long-term effects, permanent and temporary effects, positive and negative effects, and secondary, cumulative and synergistic effects".

Through analysis of the baseline data several key sustainability issues for Stafford Borough have been identified to focus the Sustainability Appraisal Framework for the Development Plan. The Sustainability Appraisal Framework is made up of sustainability objectives, indicators and targets tailored to these key issues thus enabling a meaningful assessment of how successful each document has been in addressing these issues and opportunities. Nevertheless, it is recognised in Chapter 5 of this Scoping Report that other Plans, Policies and Programmes may affect the success of each plan document.

Below sets out the key sustainability issues identified for the Stafford Borough area, based on the baseline information gathered for the Sustainability Appraisal process, seen in the Chapter 6. There may be additional sustainability issues, problems and opportunities for the Borough that hasn't been identified through the collection of baseline data.

Social, Health and Wellbeing

Issues

- High levels of deprivation in some areas of the Borough
- High number of empty homes across the Borough
- The Borough has an increasing percentage of elderly people
- A relatively high percentage of the adult population are overweight or obese

Opportunities

- Planned investment in sport and leisure facilities
- Neighbourhood Development Plans offer an opportunity for local communities to become empowered
- Relatively low crime rate

Economic

Issues

- Need to deliver more employment land across the Borough
- Ageing/shrinking workforce - need continued growth in housing and employment sites and in migration of workers.
- Ensure we have the required infrastructure for growth - including broadband

Opportunities

- Growth in advanced manufacturing

- Delivery of Brownfield Register to provide growth opportunities to meet housing demand
- Growth of business parks
- Opportunities for higher value-added companies in growth sectors
- Need to capitalise on the high skills base of Borough residents
- Support needed for Town Centre regeneration and investment

Environmental

Issues

- Loss of biodiversity habitats.
- Loss of individual character for Stafford Borough's settlements.
- Residents have relatively low access to woodland areas
- Decreasing percentage of housing completions on previously developed land
- Fragmentation of habitats can lead to decrease in population since species may be unable to disperse across a disconnected landscape;
- Climate change is likely to alter the condition and character of the landscapes due to increases in annual temperatures and changes in rainfall patterns, which may affect vegetation cover and hydrological regimes.

Opportunities

- Protection and adaptation of heritage assets.
- SAC contributions are an opportunity to protect and enhance Cannock Chase
- Delivery of Brownfield Register to promote the re-use of previously developed land
- Biodiversity Net Gain
- Habitat improvement and creation via opportunities identified in the Nature Recovery Network

8. Sustainability Objectives, Indicators and Targets

Preparing the Sustainability Appraisal Framework involves the development of sustainability objectives, targets and indicators. These elements of the framework are developed from objectives, indicators or targets set out in Plans, Policies and Programmes. Other important sources include expertise within the Local Authority and consultation with key bodies and relevant stakeholders.

As the main purpose of this Sustainability Appraisal process is to assess the policies and proposals in each Plan document against sustainability objectives, the Sustainability Framework is an important factor enabling the description, measurement, analysis and comparison of the effects of the plan. The following topics from the SEA Directive have been incorporated as elements of the framework.

- Biodiversity, fauna and flora;
- Population and human health;
- Water and soil;

- Air;
- Climatic factors;
- Cultural heritage and landscape;
- Material assets;
- Landscape; and
- The interrelationship between these factors.

It should be appreciated that each plan may only have limited scope to influence these SEA Directive topics. Other Plans, Policies and Programmes at European Union and National level will have a more direct effect, e.g. the influence of future Government Aviation Policy on Climatic Factors.

The following sustainability topics and objectives are proposed for the Sustainability Appraisal Framework:

Theme	SA Objectives
Air quality	<p>Take action to reverse the trend for increasing emissions by supporting and enabling the use of low emission technologies and actively encouraging sustainable modes of transport such as walking and cycling, particularly where it is possible to leverage the opportunities presented by new development.</p> <p>Locate and design development so that current and future residents will not regularly be exposed to poor air quality; notably the M6 motorway around Stafford and Clayton.</p>
Biodiversity	<p>Minimise, and avoid where possible, impacts to biodiversity, both within and beyond designated and non-designated sites of national and local significance.</p> <p>Achieve biodiversity net gain including through the long term enhancement and creation of well-connected, functional habitats that are resilient to the effects of climate change.</p>
Climate change adaptation	<p>Adapt to current and future flood risk by directing development away from the areas of the Borough at the highest risk of flooding from all sources.</p> <p>Provide sustainable management of current and future flood risk through sensitive and innovative planning, development layout and construction.</p>
Climate change mitigation	<p>Continue to drive down CO₂ emissions from all sources by achieving high standards of energy efficiency in new development, by providing attractive opportunities to travel by sustainable means and by protecting land suitable for renewable and low carbon energy generation, including community schemes.</p>

Economy and employment	<p>Ensure that education and skills provision meet the needs of the Borough’s existing and future labour market and improve life chances for all.</p> <p>To create high, stable and equitable levels of employment and competitiveness that recognises social and environmental issues, enhancing the vitality of the Borough’s town and villages.</p> <p>Support the needs of the local rural economy.</p> <p>To ensure that sufficient supporting/enabling infrastructure of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth and innovation.</p> <p>Increase the availability of high speed broadband especially in the villages and isolated properties and all new build properties.</p>
Health and wellbeing	<p>Improve opportunities for access for all to work, education, health and local services</p> <p>Improve the physical and mental health and wellbeing of Stafford Borough residents, including through enhancing existing health, sports, and leisure facilities and reducing health inequalities between local communities across the Borough.</p> <p>To reduce the impact of noise and light pollution; including potential traffic noise pollution.</p>
Historic environment	<p>Protect, conserve and enhance heritage assets, including their setting and significance, and contribute to the maintenance and enhancement of historic character through design, layout and setting of new development.</p>
Housing	<p>Support timely delivery of an appropriate mix of housing types and tenures, including a focus on maximising the potential from strategic brownfield opportunities, to ensure delivery of high quality, affordable and specialist housing that meets the needs of Stafford Borough’s residents, including older people.</p>
Land, soils and waste	<p>Promote the efficient and sustainable use of land and natural resources, including supporting development which makes effective use of previously developed land and avoids the best and most versatile agricultural land where applicable.</p> <p>Support the County objectives for the sustainable management of minerals and waste.</p>
Landscape	<p>To protect, enhance and, where necessary, restore the Borough’s designated landscape areas and town character, scenic beauty and local distinctiveness, through appropriate design and layout of</p>

new development, including the preservation of the Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and key views.

Population and communities	<p>Sustain and enhance the vitality and viability of Stafford Borough's towns and villages, and their communities through supporting good access to existing and planned services, facilities and community infrastructure, including green infrastructure, for new and existing residents, mindful of the potential for community needs to change over time.</p> <p>Locate development in areas that can support accessibility improvements, reducing deprivation within communities across the Borough.</p> <p>Improve safety within communities throughout the Borough; reducing and preventing crime and reducing the fear of crime</p> <p>Create a sense of community identity, belonging and pride; encouraging community engagement in local issues, and a strong voluntary sector.</p> <p>Ensure tolerance, respect and engagement with people from different cultures, backgrounds and beliefs recognising their rights and responsibilities.</p>
Transport	<p>Ensure that the provision of infrastructure is managed and delivered to meet local population and demographic change whilst helping to reduce congestion and travel times. This includes providing infrastructure that maximises accessibility for all and connects new housing developments to employment, education, health and local services, including public realm.</p>
Water resources and water quality	<p>Promote sustainable forms of development which minimises pressure on water resources, water consumption and wastewater flows, including the use of innovative features and techniques where possible, to maintain and enhance water quality of the Borough's rivers and aquifers; consistent with the aims of the Water Framework Directive.</p>

There is an increased focus on monitoring nationally, in light of the proposal to reform plan-making to ensuring a clearer focus on achieving clear 'outcomes'.

At the current time, it is suggested that monitoring efforts might focus on:

- Employment land requirements - will require close monitoring, given evolving regional and national context. In particular, the needs of the warehousing/distribution sector are subject to change.
- Housing - the Council already monitors numerous housing delivery related matters through the Authority Monitoring Report, and indicators should be kept under review. There is a need to closely monitor affordable housing delivery by sub-area/viability zone across the borough.
- Agricultural land - it is possible to monitor loss of agricultural land by grade.
- Climate change adaptation - potentially monitor housing in close proximity to a fluvial flood zone (in addition to intersecting); also the 1 in 30 year surface water flood zone.
- Climate change mitigation - it could be appropriate to monitor the proportion of new homes linked to a heat network; also the proportion of homes delivered to standards of sustainable design and construction that exceed building regulations. More generally, there is a need to carefully consider how local plan monitoring links to monitoring of borough-wide emissions.
- Water - ongoing consideration should be given to any risk of capacity breaches at Wastewater Treatment Works (WwTWs) and other risks to the status of water courses. Also, there is a need for ongoing consideration of whether the 'water stressed' nature of the sub-region, and potentially specific aquifers within the sub-region, is such that there is a need to limit further growth.

9. Next steps in the Sustainability Appraisal process

Consultation

A key aspect of the SA process is consultation. The SA process provides a mechanism to ensure that stakeholder engagement requirements are achieved by providing interested parties/organisations and the public an opportunity to inform the process and comment on decisions taken. Stakeholder engagement also ensures that environmental and social issues, constraints and opportunities are identified and assessed at an early stage of the project.

Public consultation is encouraged as a means by which to help set the environmental context and determine the scope of assessment.

How can I have my say on this consultation document?

Consultation on the new Local Plan 2025-2045: Sustainability Appraisal (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Scoping Report will take place between 8 June and 28 July 2026. Please provide any responses by 12 noon on Tuesday 28 July 2026.

We strongly encourage responses to be made using the pro-forma available on the Council's website at Strategic Planning and Placemaking Consultations | Stafford Borough Council and emailing completed forms to strategicplanningconsultations@staffordbc.gov.uk

Alternatively, if you choose to use e-mail please identify the question, section or page number to which your comments refer.

How will my comments be used?

We will acknowledge receipt of your comments and fully consider responses for the next stage of the plan-making process, although the Council will not engage through individual correspondence. All comments received will be published on the Council's website in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018.

Protecting Your Privacy

We believe you should always know what data we collect from you and how we use it, and that you should have meaningful control over both. As part of our ongoing commitment to transparency, and in relation to the General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018, we have updated our Privacy Policy.

We will only use your personal information to send you information on the Local Plan and associated planning policy matters. You can find information about how we handle your personal data by visiting www.staffordbc.gov.uk/privacynotices

and if you have any queries or would like to unsubscribe from receiving information please contact the Strategic Planning and Placemaking team using the details above.

Methodology for preparing the Sustainability Appraisal Reports

Following the Scoping Report stage (Stage A - Scoping) of the SA process, the Sustainability Appraisal Commentary will be prepared to test the objectives for the Development Plan against the SA Framework and to appraise the Proposed Local Plan content and evidence. The Sustainability Appraisal Commentary and the Proposed Local Plan content and evidence will then be consulted upon at the same time, after which a Sustainability Appraisal Report will be published and consulted upon alongside the Proposed Local Plan. Finally, the Council will prepare the submission plan and submit the policy documents alongside the amended Sustainability Appraisal Reports.

The remaining stages of Development Plan Sustainability Appraisal process are as follows:

- Stage B2 - Developing the Options for each plan document
- Stage B3 and B4 - Predicting and Evaluating the Effects of the plan document
- Stage C - Preparing the SA Report
- Stage D - Consulting on the preferred options and the SA Report
- Stage E - Monitoring the significant effects of implementing the Plan document

Stage B2 - Developing and Refining the Plan Options

The Sustainability Appraisal Objectives set out how the key sustainability issues will be addressed, whilst the Plan Objectives will set out what the Development Plan is aiming to achieve in terms of land use and planning policies.

A key element of the Sustainability Appraisal process is to compare the Sustainability Appraisal Objectives with the Plan Objectives to appraise the plan in terms of sustainability and the achievement of targets under SEA target areas. Using the table below the Plan Objectives will be compared to the Sustainability Appraisal Objectives. The purpose of this analysis is to ensure that the Plan Objectives are in accordance with the Sustainability Appraisal Objectives to assist with the development of policy.

Table 2: Example of Appraisal Table

Plan Objective Number	Sustainability Objectives - Economic				
	1	2	3	4	5
PO1					

	Compatible	Compatible	Compatible	Conflict	Compatible
Comments: Plan Objective 1 is in conflict with Sustainability Objective 4 because					
PO2	Compatible	Compatible	Compatible	Compatible	Compatible
Sustainability Objectives - Social					
	6	7	8	9	10

The Sustainability Appraisal Commentary will also test the compatibility of the Plan Objectives with each other, using the table below. Where conflicts exist between the various objectives these will be highlighted. Whilst the aim would be to achieve consistency with each other, in practice there will be tensions between Plan Objectives. The purpose of this exercise is to highlight where win-win situations cannot be achieved. Where this occurs decision makers are required to determine where the priorities should lie.

Table 3: Example of Plan Objectives Appraisal Table

	PO1	PO2	PO3	PO4
PO1				
PO2	Compatible			
PO3	Compatible	Compatible		
PO4	Compatible	Conflict	Compatible	

During the preparation of the Proposed Local Plan content and evidence various policies will then be developed in order to meet the Plan Objectives. Each of these policies will be tested through the Sustainability Appraisal Framework to identify the sustainability effects of each policy and to assess its performance in terms of sustainability.

The various policies and alternatives will be appraised against the sustainability objectives to establish whether the effect is positive, negative or uncertain through the short, medium and long-term perspective. For example, will the policy create two jobs or a hundred jobs; will the policy temporarily cause noise pollution whilst buildings are constructed or lead to a more permanent noise infringement. As such, during this Sustainability Commentary stage general differences between the alternatives will be considered and documented. Further details will be duly assessed as the policies are developed and the Plan document's progress through the various stages.

The most effective way of appraising the effects of a policy is by comparing it with a state, an option or an objective. Using the table below refined policies will be compared with the sustainability objectives. This process may also lead to new policies being developed or composed of several different aspects of the policy.

Table 4: Example of Policy and Alternatives Appraisal Process

	Policy A			Alternative B			Alternative C		
SA	S	M	L	S	M	L	S	M	L
1	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	0	-
2	+	+	+	0	-	-	0	-	-
3	+	+	+	-	-	-	0	0	+
4	+	+	+	-	-	-	+	+	+
5	0	0	0	-	-	-	+	+	+
6	+	0	-	+	+	+	+	-	-
7	+	+	+	-	-	-	+	0	-
8	+	+	+	+	0	-	+	+	+
9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
10	+	+	+	-	-	-	+	+	+
11	+	+	+	-	-	-	+	0	-
12	+	+	-	-	-	-	+	0	+
13	+	0	-	0	+	+	+	+	+
14	+	0	-	0	+	+	+	+	+
15	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	0	+
	Policy A			Alternative B			Alternative C		
Comments	Policy A			Alternative B			Alternative C		
	Recommendation								
	Policy ** performs best in terms of sustainability objectives etc....								

Where policies could be altered in light of the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) process this will be highlighted in the SA Commentary. The Sustainability

Appraisal Commentary will also provide comments on any sustainability issues that arise during the refinement of the policies or during the consultation process.

The developing and refining policies process will form part of the Sustainability Appraisal Commentary, which will be consulted upon at the same time as the Proposed Plan content and evidence. Alongside the appraisal of plan policies the SA Commentary will also compare plan policies against the alternative of 'do nothing' or business as usual. This will highlight what benefits each plan policy could provide.

Stages B3 and B4 - Predicting and evaluating the effects of the plan

The next stage of the Sustainability Appraisal process is to assess, in more detail, each policy in the Proposed Local Plan to determine whether it is likely to have a significant effect on the environment and sustainable development. The objective of this stage is to predict and evaluate the effects of plan policies so that where adverse effects are predicted consideration will be given to what mitigation measures may be required. This will lead to Stage C - preparing the Sustainability Appraisal Report.

Each policy will be assessed using the table set out below, with recommendations for refining the policy included in the process. At this stage it is expected that the predictions regarding the policy impacts may be broad based and qualitative rather than detailed and quantitative if there are limitations in the data that is available. Where possible the potential effects will be quantified, although where this is not possible a subjective judgement will be made.

Table 5: Example of predicted impacts table

Policy 1: [Description]						
SA obj.	Target	Can the effect be quantified?	Effects over time			Comments
			Short term	Medium term	Long term	
Economic objectives						
1						
2						
3						
4						

5						
6						
Summary						
Social objectives						
1						
2						

Completion of this process will make it possible to decide if any of the policies are likely to have any adverse impacts. Where adverse impacts are predicted, information will be required on the measures proposed to prevent, reduce or offset these adverse effects. Where an adverse effect cannot be mitigated consideration should be given to deleting or modifying the policy. If a policy does not have any adverse impacts Stafford Borough Council will try and enhance its positive and beneficial effects.

It will also be necessary to assess and record the cumulative effects of all the preferred policy options against the sustainability objectives using the table below. Where there are adverse cumulative impacts, recommendations will be made in the Sustainability Appraisal Report.

Table 6: Example of cumulative effects

Plan Policies	SA Objectives								
	Economic Objectives						Social Objectives		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
Effects									

Where policies are proposed for alteration in light of the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) process these will be highlighted in the Sustainability Appraisal Report. The SA process will also provide a commentary on any sustainability issues that arise during the refinement of the policy. Conclusions on the overall sustainability effects of the policy will be provided as part of the SA Report.

Furthermore, the Sustainability Appraisal Report will detail the proposals for monitoring the sustainability effects of the plan document, allowing the actual effects of the Plan document to be measured against those predicted in the SA.

The appraisal of the effects of the plan will form part of the Sustainability Appraisal Report, which will be available for consultation at the same time as the Proposed Local Plan.

Following the consultation on the Proposed Local Plan and the Sustainability Appraisal Report the policy development will be used to prepare the policies for inclusion in the Submission Plan to the Secretary of State. At the stage the policies in the Submission document will be assessed through the Sustainability Appraisal Framework and the Sustainability Appraisal Report will be amended to detail this assessment process.

Stage D - Consulting on the Plan and the Sustainability Appraisal Report

The Revised Sustainability Appraisal Report will be submitted to the Secretary of State alongside each Submitted Plan, each of which will be subject to the independent Examination process. The independent Examination will consider whether the Sustainability Appraisal process has been incorporated into the production of submitted plans and whether the requirements of the SEA Directive have been met.

The Environmental Report is a key requirement of the SEA Directive. The Environmental Report documents the whole SEA process and provides a record of how environmental considerations are incorporated into production of the Plan. The elements of the SA process that meet this requirement will be highlighted in a table at the end of the SA Report. The suggested layout of the table is set out below.

Table 7: Environmental Report Table

SEA Requirements for Environmental Report	Location in Sustainability Report
An outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan or programme, and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes	
The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution therefore without implementation of the plan or programme	
The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected	
Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan or programme including those relating to any areas of a particular environmental, <i>economic</i> or <i>social</i> importance, such	

as areas designated pursuant to Directives 79/409/EEC and 92/43/EEC.	
The environmental protection objectives, established at international, Community or national level, which are relevant to the plan or programme and the way those objectives and any environmental considerations have been considered during its preparation.	
The likely significant effects on the environment, including on issues such as biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the interrelationship between the above factors.	
The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the plan or programme.	
An outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with, and a description of how the assessment was undertaken including any difficulties encountered in complying with the required information.	
A description of measures envisaged concerning monitoring in accordance with Art. 10.	
A non-technical summary of the information provided under the above headings.	
The report must include the information that may reasonably be required taking into account current knowledge and methods of assessment, the contents and level of detail in the plan or programme, its stage in the decision-making process and the extent to which certain matters are more appropriately assessed at different levels in that process to avoid duplication of the assessment (Art. 5.2)	
Consultation	
Authorities with environmental responsibility, when deciding on the scope and level of detail of the information which must be included in the environmental/sustainability appraisal report (Art 5.4)	
Authorities with environmental, social or economic responsibility and the public, shall be given an early and effective opportunity within appropriate time frames to express their opinion on the draft plan or programme and the accompanying environmental/sustainability appraisal report before the adoption of the plan or programme (Art. 6.1, Art. 6.2)	
Other EU Member States, where the implementation of the plan or programme is likely to have significant effects on the environment of that country (art. 7)	
Taking the environmental / sustainability appraisal report and the results of the consultations into account in decision-making (Art.8)	
Provision of information on the decision:	
When the plan or programme is adopted, the	

<p>public and any countries consulted under Art. 7 must be informed and the following made available to those so informed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The plan or programme as adopted • A statement summarising how environmental, social and economic considerations have been integrated into the plan or programme and how the environmental/sustainability appraisal report of Article 5, the opinions expressed pursuant to Article 6 and the results of consultations entered into pursuant to Art.7 have been taken into account in accordance with Art. 8 and the reasons for choosing the plan or programme as adopted, in the light of the other reasonable alternatives dealt with; and • The measures decided concerning monitoring (Art.9) 	
<p>Monitoring of the significant environmental, social and economic effects of the plan's or programme's implementation (Art 10.)</p>	
<p>Quality assurance: environmental/sustainability appraisal reports should be of a sufficient standard to meet the requirements of the SEA Directive.</p>	

Examination of the Plan

Following the independent Examination into each Plan document the Inspector will provide Stafford Borough Council with a Binding Report setting out recommended policy changes. Where necessary a Sustainability Appraisal of any significant policy changes made through the Examination process will be required. The completion of this task will result in a second revised Sustainability Appraisal report being produced.

Stage E - Monitoring the Significant Effects of Implementing the Development Plan

After Stafford Borough Council has received the Inspector's Binding Reports. The Plan can be adopted and published. At this time a statement will be issued summarising how the SA results and consultee's opinions have been taken into account, an explanation of the policy choices made and information concerning the arrangements for monitoring.

Monitoring will allow the actual effects of the Plan document to be tested against those predicted in the Sustainability Appraisal Reports. It will help to ensure that issues, which are identified through the implementation of each Plan document, whether or not they were foreseen, can be identified and future predictions can be made more accurately. The monitoring information will also be used to provide baseline data for future Plan documents and SA Reports and can be found in the Technical Appendix.

10. Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA)

The National Planning Policy Framework provides clear guidance that development should not take place where there is substantial risk of flooding. Paragraph 170 states:

'Inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding should be avoided by directing development away from areas at highest risk (whether existing or future). Where development is necessary in such areas, the development should be made safe for its lifetime without increasing flood risk elsewhere.'

Stafford Borough will appointed consultants to carry out a SFRA. The results of the assessment will be reported in a separate document, information will be drawn on when assessing policy development through the Sustainability Appraisal process.

11. Habitats Regulations Assessment

The purpose of Habitats Regulations Assessment of land use plans is to ensure that protection of the integrity of European Sites is a part of the planning process at a regional and local level. The requirement for Habitats Regulations Assessment of plans or projects is outlined in Article 6 (3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC.

Whilst the Sustainability Appraisal and the Habitats Regulations Assessment are two separate processes each with their own legal requirements, the SA will draw on results and evidence gathered by the Habitats Regulations Assessment process. Where this will contribute towards the assessment of policy and development options reference to the Habitats Regulations Assessment process and related evidence will be reported within the SA documents.

Below is a list of Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) sites within or on the edge of Stafford Borough:

- Cannock Chase
- Chartley Moss
- Pasturefields Salt Marsh
- Cop Mere
- Aqualate Mere
- Motte Meadows

Glossary

Term	Description
Consultation Body	Authorities which because of their environmental responsibilities are likely to be concerned by effects of implementing plans and programmes and must be consulted at specific stages of the SEA. The Consultation Bodies designated in the SEA regulations are the Historic England, Natural England and the Environment Agency.
Contaminated Land	Land that is polluted by virtue of past industrial and chemical uses or naturally occurring radiation, which makes it unsuitable for development without decontamination taking place to remove potential hazards to occupiers and potential users of the development.
Countryside Character Areas	Areas of distinctive landscape, wildlife and natural features as defined by the Countryside Agency.
Cultural heritage	Places or things that are valued because they give us a sense of the past and of our cultural identity.
Cumulative Effects	These effects can be caused by a number of developments which, individually and in themselves, may have insignificant effects, but together combine to create a significant effect.
DEFRA	Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, responsible for promoting sustainable development, protecting and improving rural, urban, marine and the global environment.
Derelict Land	Land that has been previously developed but has been allowed to fall into disrepair and is no longer used.
Economic Development	The development of the economy of the Council area by the creation of employment opportunities.
Environmental Assets	All environmental assets that provide ecosystem services, e.g. landscape, habitats, pollination, erosion prevention, and the absorption of emissions and pollutants resulting from human activities.
Environmental Capital	The combination of the assets (i.e. the tangible commodities, land, trees, fields, etc.) with the environmental benefits derived from them (leisure opportunities, tranquility, natural habitats etc.)
Environmental Limits	The limit to which an environment or ecosystem can cope with the population, resource exploitation and pollution pressures placed on it. Beyond the environmental limit, there is a risk of causing long-term damage to the health and productivity of an environment.
Environmental Report	A document required by the SEA Directive, as part of an environmental assessment, that identifies, describes and evaluates the likely effects on the environment of implementing a plan or programme.

Fauna	All the animal life of a given place or time.
Flora	All the plant life of a given place or time.
Green Belt	Land designated in development plans to be kept open in accordance with PPG2.
Greenfield Sites	Land that has never been built on, usually grassland, farmland or heath.
Habitat	A site or areas inhabited by wild flora and fauna upon which they are reliant for their continued free existence.
Heritage	Things of value inherited or passed on from generation to generation, qualities which are worthwhile to preserve for prosperity.
Historic Parks and Gardens	Parks or gardens of special historic interest.
Indicator	Measure of variables over time, often used to measure achievement of objectives.
Indirect (Secondary) Effects	Effects which are not a direct result of the plan, often produced away from or as a result of a complex pathway
Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)	Telephone, computing and other technology designed to enable Communications Technology remote working and communication.
Infrastructure	Roads, sewers, drainage and the availability of energy supplies at the most basic level, through to social infrastructure such as schools and community centres.
Listed Building	A building contained in a list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest prepared by the Secretary of State for the Culture, Media and Sport (under Section 1 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990).
Local Nature Reserve	Sites established by the Local Authority which can make a valuable contribution to nature conservation, local wildlife or geological interest, providing opportunities for education and enjoyment at the local level.
Local Transport Plan	Plan prepared by Staffordshire County Council detailing transport priorities and actions to be taken.
Local Need	Anticipated requirements (e.g. for housing) generated by local growth or other (e.g. demographic) trends. This specifically excludes demands generated by inward migration.
Modal Split	The proportion of people traveling by different types of transport.
Mitigate	To alleviate or to moderate a quality or condition that is harmful or unpleasant (e.g. pollution)
Mitigation Measures	Measures designed and intended to reduce adverse environmental effects that cannot be avoided.
National Nature Reserve (NNR)	An area of national / international importance for nature conservation and managed in accordance with a nature reserve agreement.
National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)	The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was introduced in March 2012 to replace previous national planning policy, and has been revised subsequently. The document sets out the government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied.
National Playing Fields Association (NPFA)	A charity where the aim is to acquire, protect and improve playing fields and other recreational space for the community.
Net Gain	The useful and/or positive benefits remaining after all deductions have been made.

Non-statutory Designations	A designation not enacted, created, or regulated by statute.
Objective	A statement of what is intended, specifying the desired direction of change in trends.
Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)	The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) was established to support the NPPF. PPG provides detailed guidance across a number of specific categories.
Precautionary Principle	The assumption that an activity or development might be damaging unless it can be proved otherwise.
Previously Developed Land (PDL)	Housing land that is or was occupied by a permanent structure (excluding agricultural or forestry buildings) and associated fixed surface structures. The definition covers the curtilage of the development.
Public Transport Nodes	Areas that offer greater accessibility by public transport and reduce reliance on the private car.
Ramsar	A wetland site designated under the European Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance.
Reclaim/Re-use	To regenerate, rescue or restore an area to bring it back into use.
Renewable Energy	Energy flows that occur naturally and repeatedly in the environment (e.g. from sun, wind or wave or fall of water). Plant and some waste materials are also potential sources.
Rural Diversification	Engaging in new and different economic activity to strengthen the rural economy and support existing agricultural businesses and farm incomes.
SEA Directive	European Directive 2001/42/EC 'On the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment.'
SEA Regulations	The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations, 2004
Scoping	The process of deciding the scope and level of detail of an SA, including sustainability effects and alternatives which need to be considered, the assessment methods to be used, and the structure and contents of the SA Report.
Special Area of Conservation (SAC)	A European designation for the conservation of sites of international conservation importance, designated under the European Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Fauna and Flora.
Special Needs Housing	A segment of the housing market where a proportion of the housing is targeted or reserved for those people who require special housing requirements. It covers a spectrum of providers and tenures including housing association, joint ventures, public sector and owner occupation.
Sites of Biological Importance (SBIs)	A site of biological importance that is of county importance for its wildlife interest.
Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)	A protected area identified as being of national importance in terms of wildlife, flora, fauna, geological or physiological features. They represent irreplaceable parts of our natural heritage
Special Protection Area (SPA)	A European designation for the protection of wild birds, designated under the European Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds.
Standardised Mortality Ratio (SMR)	Is the ratio of the actual number of deaths one would expect if the population had the same death rate as a standard population?
Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)	A tool for integrating environmental considerations into decision-making by ensuring that significant environmental effects of the decision are taken into account.

Sustainability Appraisal (SA)	Appraisals of plans, strategies and proposals to test them against the four broad objectives set out in the government's sustainable development strategy.
Sustainable Development (SD)	Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Brundtland 1987).
Synergies	The working of two things to produce an effect greater than the sum of their individual effects.
Target	An objective that seeks a specified desired end, stated usually within a specified time-scale.
Unstable Land	Land which by reason of geological conditions or man-made changes, is likely to be subject to movement or collapse, putting at risk life and developments located on or near it.

Agenda Item 4(b)i

Review of the Revenues and Benefits Service Debt Collection Process

Committee: Cabinet
Date of Meeting: 21 May 2026
Report of: Deputy Chief Executive (Resources)
Portfolio: Resources Portfolio

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To receive the report of the Task and Finish Group which reviewed the policies and processes involved in the Collection and Recovery of Council Tax and Business Rates.
- 1.2 To approve the recommendations below.

2 Recommendations

That:-

- 2.1 The report be noted and accepted;
- 2.2 No significant change be made to the Billing, Collection and Recovery Policy at this time;
- 2.3 Any statutory changes to the Council Tax and Business Rate collection process be included in an updated policy, and be reported to Cabinet, as necessary;
- 2.4 Officers continue to identify those debts which are irrecoverable and when necessary, process them for write-off in accordance with the Council's Constitution;
- 2.5 The project to review older debts be continued into the 2026-27 financial year and that the effectiveness of continued action be reviewed on a 6-monthly basis by the Section 151 Officer.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.6 The group was convened with the following remit:
- To ensure that debt collection arrangements are effective and proportionate in approach.
 - To ensure that the Council's policies to support residents who are unable to pay are adequate.
 - To review the results of the increased resource, dedicated to collection of prior year arrears.
- 2.7 The Council must balance the need to use its recovery powers, which are considerable and sometimes unpopular, and the need to keep the write offs as low as they can be, with an acceptance that some of our older debts cannot be recovered.
- 2.8 Having received extensive information about the process undertaken and the challenges facing the service, members of the group feel that that they now much better understand the issues and are satisfied that the Council is using its resource and its powers appropriately.
- 2.9 The creation of the group coincided with Cabinet approval of £175K of additional resource to the Revenues Team to be used specifically to review old debts with a view to identifying what is recoverable and what is not. Members received regular updates of the progress of this work and are satisfied with the progress that has been made.
- 2.10 The Council's share of the revenue recovered has exceeded the cost of the project and members feel that a continuation of the project is appropriate.

3 Key Issues

- 3.1 Traditionally the Council's performance on the collection of Council Tax and Business Rates is good with around 97%-98% of what is due being collected within the year that it relates to. Action continues after the financial year has ended with much of the remaining balances also being recovered.
- 3.2 The value of Council Tax and Business Rates collectable is very high (£111m and £60m per year respectively) and so even the small proportion of uncollected amounts becomes significant.
- 3.3 The Council has traditionally been reluctant to write off arrears balances and so the indebtedness of defaulters has increased incrementally over a period of many years. The balance between keeping write offs low and accepting that some balances are irrecoverable needed to be reviewed.

4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities

None

5 Report Detail

5.1 The Task and Finish Group met 4 times between 2 September 2025 and 26 March 2026 with meeting content as follows:

Meeting 1 considered the problems facing the Revenues Team and their frustrations relating to weaknesses in legislation and loopholes that are being exploited. The Council's response to a Government consultation paper was also discussed.

Meeting 2 examined the Billing, Collection and Recovery Policy in detail (see 5.2 below and **APPENDIX 1**) It also discussed plans to increase the degree to which traditional 'paper' communications can be moved onto electronic platforms to achieve quicker responses to the customer and save money for the Council. (5.6 below)

Meeting 3 looked at certain scenarios whereby debts should be recognised as irrecoverable and therefore be written off. (5.3)

Meeting 4 agreed the content of the final report.

5.2 Billing, Collection and Recovery Policy

5.2.1 The policy, which is attached at **APPENDIX 1** was last updated in 2023. No process changes are needed at this time, though the Government announced on 15 April 2026 that it intends to make some legislative changes, which will affect our recovery process. Legislation is awaited but Government intentions, insofar as recovery and enforcement issue are concerned, are:

- To require Council Tax to be paid by 12 instalments unless the council taxpayer specifically requests 10. This will apply to new liabilities from 2027 and to all council taxpayers from 2028.
- To extend the timeframe before a person loses the right to pay in instalments, until at least 63 days after the first missed payment. (From April 2027).
- To set out statutory steps councils must take ahead of formal enforcement action. The government will consult with councils on the specific steps, with implementation expected from April 2027.
- To set a cap of £100 on the costs that councils can charge for seeking a liability order from April 2027. Stafford Borough Council currently charges £95 and so is below the cap.

- To continue to consider if and how Councils to use HMRC and DWP data to recover unpaid Council Tax. The government will launch a third pilot which will incorporate learnings from previous pilots and determine the best approach before rolling out further to all local authorities. No timescale is given and it is not clear how the third pilot will operate or if there is an opportunity to join the pilot scheme.

5.2.2 As changes are enacted in legislation, officers will revise our practices immediately and bring a revised policy to Cabinet.

5.3 Write Off Process

5.3.1 The Council's Constitution requires that any irrecoverable debts of £10,000 or more are considered for write off by Cabinet. Authority is delegated to the Section 151 Officer to write off debts below this amount. No change is proposed to this policy, which enables members to review the most significant debts with more operational matters being dealt with by officers.

5.3.2 The circumstances in which debts are traditionally written off include:

- The debtor has died and insufficient estate exists
- The debt is subject to bankruptcy or winding up orders and cannot be recovered.
- The debt is subject to the debt relief instruments such as Debt Relief Orders or Individuals Voluntary arrangements.
- The debtor has absconded and cannot be traced.

5.3.3 The group discussed the Council's traditional reluctance to write off debts, in other circumstances and the consequences of that.

5.3.4 A significant piece of work is ongoing to try to recover outstanding arrears and this has established some categories of cases whereby we do not expect to achieve payment and so write off will be expedited. The types of case are summarised below.

- Deceased Estates owing under £1,000
- Petty balances under £10
- Small balances - under £100 and over 2 years old
- Statute barred debts, 6 years old not having progressed to court.
- Debts over 10 years old for which all reasonable recovery action has been taken, without success.

- Debts under £500 for which all reasonable recovery action has been taken, without success

5.4 Arrears Summary

5.4.1 During the period from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.

- Council Tax arrears have been reduced by around £2.4m, of which £1.68m was payment, of which over £135K is retained by Stafford Borough Council
- £1.8m in payments have been collected against arrears of Business Rates. Our share of the payments received equates to around £508K.

5.4.2 The £175K invested in staffing resource, would therefore appear to be justified.

5.5 Continuing Project

5.5.1 The results summarised above are pleasing and justify the investment, but more work is needed. The £175k investment, which was matched by Cannock Chase Council paid for 6fte agency staff, to support the shared Revenues team.

- **4fte** had been identified as needed to support the processing of day-to-day billing and recovery work, which had developed a significant and increasing backlog. That work is now up to date and progressing as it should. The assessment of resource needed appears to be accurate.
- **2fte** was committed to reviewing prior year debts. This is going well but progressing slower than hoped in some areas. The work to review the arrears was not completed by the end of the financial year and repayment of the debts which we put into recovery will happen over a period of several years.

5.5.2 Efficiencies across the Revenues and Benefit Service, resulting from improved processing, automation and system usage have enabled us to generate vacant posts via natural wastage and so the 4fte required to deal with day-to-day Revenues work, of the shared service, can be accommodated by the re-designation of these vacant posts. Recruitment to these posts will begin shortly and we would expect that the new recruits will be recruited and trained by October 2026.

5.5.3 Whilst recruitment and training is ongoing, it is proposed that the 6fte agency staff that are currently engaged, by the shared service, be extended until 30 September. A decision can be made at that time as to whether continued agency support is needed to deal with the arrears project. It is proposed that the ongoing business case for continuation be reviewed by the Section 151 Officer on a 6-monthly basis.

5.6 Electronic Communications

5.6.1 During the consideration of the strengths and weaknesses of the Revenues Service, particular discussion took place about the relatively low numbers of Council Tax and Business Rates payers who have chosen to receive their bill by email. This facility has existed for several years with only 20% take up by Council Tax payers and 31% of Business Rate payers receiving e-bills at the time of meeting 2 on 2 October.

5.6.2 E-billing take up as at end of February was

- 22% on Council Tax
- 46% on Business Rates

5.6.3 With postal charges increasing and Royal Mail's delivery times increasingly being the subject of complaints to our service, we will proactively seek to increase our electronic communications across the whole of our service. This process has begun with an active e-billing campaign beginning in January and recipients of paper bills being encouraged to go digital by an enclosure with the 2026 annual bills.

5.6.4 Technology exists to use SMS/text messaging to prompt contact from residents for whom we hold mobile telephone numbers. Officers are testing this technology with a view to implement it in the most appropriate way, in the coming year. We anticipate this reducing the number of formal reminders that need to be issued and again reducing our costs.

6 Implications

6.1 Financial

The review itself has no financial implications. If implemented, the recommendations will involve initial financial outlay in the region of £88,000 for each council which is expected to be greatly exceeded by increased receipts. The continuing project will be subject to regular review of its cost effectiveness.

6.2 Legal

As a Billing Authority, for Council Tax and a Charging Authority, for business rates, the council has a duty to collect as much of the local taxes due to it as it reasonably can. The legal powers to do so are contained in the Local Government Finance acts of 1992 and 1988 respectively.

6.3 Human Resources

The redesignation of vacant posts to increase the Revenues Team is included in the report.

6.4 Risk Management

None

6.5 Equalities and Diversity

None

6.6 Health

None

6.7 Climate Change

None

7 Appendices

Appendix 1 - Billing, Collection and Recovery Policy

8 Previous Consideration

Resources Scrutiny Committee - 24 March 2026 - Minute No RSC26

9 Background Papers

None

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Ward Interest: None

Report Track: Resources Scrutiny Committee 24 March 2026
Cabinet 21 May 2026

Key Decision: No



**STAFFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL
REVENUES AND BENEFITS SERVICES**

Billing, Collection and Recovery Policy

March 2026

Council Tax and Business Rates Collection and Recovery Policy

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Billing Collection and Recovery

1 Introduction

Stafford Borough Council is fully committed to ensuring that all aspects of the collection and recovery processes are delivered in the most efficient and effective ways, to the highest standards of customer care and having regard to the individual needs of customers and the interests of the residents and businesses that we serve.

The Council is also committed to ensuring that its taxpayers' interests are properly protected by maximising the income that can be generated for receipts of Council Tax and Business Rates.

This document sets out the policy guidelines that the Council will follow, in the billing, collection and recovery of Council Tax and Business Rates.

2 Statement of Objectives

- We will issue a prompt, correct bill that is understandable and easy to pay
- We will collect monies outstanding quickly and efficiently
- We will treat all liable persons with courtesy, respect and sensitivity.
- We will ensure any person experiencing legitimate difficulty in paying has the opportunity to agree flexible payment arrangements.
- We will attempt to contact the tax payer as early as possible after payment default occurs to avoid formal recovery action where possible.
- At all stages of our recovery action are an attempt to contact the tax payer to arrange mutually acceptable payment arrangements.
- We will ensure those who attempt to avoid paying without legitimate reason will be pursued using all legal means.
- We will recover all costs incurred in recovery action from the relevant tax payer.
- We will provide clear advice at every stage of recovery including tax payers' rights and responsibilities and also sources of independent advice.
- We will promote regular Direct Debit payments and other regular payment schemes that ensure all amounts due are collected in the year due.
- We will ensure that any exemptions, discounts and reductions are paid only to those who are genuinely entitled to them.

3 Background

The collection and recovery of Business Rates and Council Tax is prescribed by the Local Government Finance Acts of 1988 and 1992 respectively, and subsequent regulations.

The Council must undertake collection and recovery within this legal framework, but it does allow for some degree of discretion regarding the manner and emphasis of administering the procedures.

Procedures are designed to take account of several basic principles, which are crucial to ensure a successful process and make sure that there is a fair and equitable service to the taxpayers of the Council.

Maximising the Council's income through receipts of Council Tax and Business Rates is essential to facilitate the services provided by this Council, and by other preceptors. We will achieve this by:

- Ensuring that all chargeable property is brought into the rating list or valuation list promptly.
- Ensuring that only legitimate claims for reductions are accepted.
- Ensuring that "scams" designed to avoid liability for charges are countered.
- Ensuring that Bills are issued promptly and collected.
- Promoting efficient collection methods.
- Taking swift, but fair and proportionate action against defaulters.
- Ensuring that any discretionary reliefs granted, support the Council's priorities, comply with our policy and are supported by the appropriate business justification.

4 The Policy

Prevention is the first essential step in a sensitive and cost-effective recovery process. There are several measures that can be taken to minimise indebtedness at an early stage which reduce the necessity for costly enforcement action which not only reduces costs but works towards avoiding potential hardship for taxpayers. Our main priority is to make early contact with taxpayers to establish the correct amount that is payable and make a mutually acceptable arrangement to pay, which does not increase indebtedness.

We will endeavour to distinguish between those who have genuine difficulty in paying their debts and those who are deliberately withholding, delaying or giving false evidence in respect of payment of debt. All taxpayers will be given the opportunity to make arrangements to pay and any sanctions will only be taken after attempts to make satisfactory arrangements have failed.

We will ensure that those who have the means to pay are required to do so on the due date specified on their bill and procedures will be in place to ensure that recovery action is taken uniformly against anyone who fails to pay for no good reason, thereby ensuring that all taxpayers are treated equitably.

We will ensure that all available allowances, discounts, rebates and reliefs are granted in appropriate cases at the earliest possible time in order to ensure the amount owed is correct. We will make all reasonable attempts at all stages of recovery to identify taxpayers who may be entitled to claim discounts or other reductions. Taxpayers will be encouraged and assisted to make appropriate applications.

We will identify payment default as early as possible and will then contact the taxpayer, to attempt to make arrangements to pay.

We will ensure that all of our documentation is clear and easy to understand, and that appropriate publicity is undertaken to encourage people to pay early or to contact us promptly in order to avoid their debt building up.

We will consider the taxpayer's financial and personal circumstances at every stage of contact, particularly as early as possible after the debt is established to allow reasonable timescales in which to settle the outstanding debt.

All statutory notices will be issued as early as possible within the legal framework to ensure maximum cash flow (having taken account of the various exceptions within this policy document).

Whilst in general payments will be required in accordance with the regulations, where taxpayers pay regularly, but not in accordance with the statutory instalment scheme, we will be as flexible as possible to their needs of when it is suitable for them to pay. Our policy aim is to ensure payment of the full bill for the year, within the year.

We will monitor outstanding debts and take appropriate recovery action. Where there is default on an arrangement, we will attempt to contact the taxpayer in order to either review the arrangement or to take further recovery action.

We will make all reasonable attempts to identify and bill partners and other individuals (where they exist) who may be jointly liable for a charge in order to recover against the person who has the greatest ability to pay.

This policy will be available on the Council's website and in appropriate circumstances, the Council will issue press releases on specific cases.

5 Dealing with Vulnerable People.

The Council recognises and takes very seriously its duty to support vulnerable people, to ensure that our services are provided fairly and equitably to all. This responsibility is of particular importance, when considering the actions that we take in terms of issuing bills and the actions needed to enforce unpaid debts.

Vulnerability takes several different forms and there can be no single solution that can be applied in all circumstances. All instances of vulnerability that are brought to the attention of the Revenues Team will be considered on their own merits and where specific actions are considered necessary and are reasonable, they will be taken. It is often the case that an individual's particular vulnerability will not remove their liability to pay or the necessity of recovery action, but help will be given when appropriate.

Ordinarily, the Council would expect specific actions and adjustments to be made in the case of vulnerability caused by disability, old age, illness or an inability to deal with financial matters, though this list is not exhaustive.

The actions that the Council would ordinarily expect to take include but are not exclusive to:

- Noting the vulnerability, to enable identification of it when dealing with ongoing issues, with a particular resident.
- Issuing bills and correspondence in alternative formats or languages other than English.
- Having bills and correspondence directed to an agreed third party such as family member, friend appointee or attorney.
- Contacting and/or discussing issues with those third parties as they arise.
- Ensuring, as far as is reasonably practicable, that the individual is receiving any discounts or reductions that they may be able to claim.
- Referring individuals to voluntary organisations or other third-party agencies when specialist help may seem to be needed.
- Individual consideration of specific circumstances prior to the commencement of Enforcement action.
- Notifying enforcement agents of known vulnerabilities when they are engaged to enforce debts against vulnerable people.
- Ensuring that Enforcement Agents have in place adequate measures to deal appropriately with vulnerabilities that they become aware of.

Dependant upon the point at which a potential vulnerability is brought to the attention of the Revenues Team, the actions previously taken or ongoing, it may be appropriate for the Council to seek proof of the vulnerability being claimed, before embarking on a specific or form of action.

6 Bill and Reminder Stages

6.1. Bills

- We will issue bills and revised bills, where necessary, as early as possible.
- We will encourage Council Tax and Business rate payers to receive their bill electronically in preference to paper bills.
- We will promote and encourage Direct Debit as the easiest, most effective method of payment but all other methods will be made freely available.

- Direct Debit payers will be offered a choice of alternative payment dates within the month.
- Monthly instalments are the preferred method of payment frequency but any reasonable method of payment within the instalment period will be considered.

6.2. Joint and Several Liability

- A bill may be addressed to one or more joint taxpayers in respect of an amount for which they are jointly and severally liable.
- The recovery procedures may be applied to one or more than one of the joint taxpayers.
- Different recovery proceedings cannot be applied simultaneously to more than one joint taxpayer for the same debt.

6.3. Missed Payments - Reminders

- Taxpayers are required to pay in accordance with the regulations. We will aim to issue reminders within one calendar month of an instalment being missed in accordance with the regulations.
- The reminder will inform the taxpayer of the amount in arrears and that if payment is not received within 7 days the facility to pay by instalments will be withdrawn and will result in further recovery action for the full years charge.
- If the instalments are brought up to date within the statutory period or we make an agreement with the taxpayer, we will not take any further action providing future payments are made correctly.

6.4. Final Notices

Final Notices, requiring payment of the full amount within seven days, will be issued when:

- The overdue amount represents the whole balance of the charge for a year, i.e. no future instalments will become due. Or
- The required number of Reminder Notices have already been served and complied with for a particular debt (one reminder is required for Business Rates, two are required for Council Tax).

6.5. Summons and Liability Orders

- If payments are not made as required or agreed, the Council will make complaint to the Magistrates' Court and in accordance with the regulations, a summons will be issued giving at least 16 days notice before the hearing date.

- At the hearing, if the court is satisfied that the charge is legally payable and remains unpaid, the Magistrates are required to issue a Liability Order, together with an order for reasonable costs.
- Taxpayers who do not attend Court will usually be dealt with in their absence.
- Unless alternative arrangements for payment have been made, or a course of recovery action decided upon, in the case of Council Tax debts, a notice will be sent to the taxpayer when a Liability Order has been granted by the Magistrates. The notice may be issued either directly by the Council or by agents acting on our behalf.
- This notice will include the statutory requirement for information regarding the taxpayer's financial circumstances and employment, so that arrangements to recover the debt may be made from earnings or Income Support/Job Seekers Allowance as appropriate.
- In addition to the statutory requirement for financial information, this notice will emphasise the need to make an acceptable arrangement to pay based on the taxpayer's financial circumstances.
- Where a defaulter is known to be in receipt of Local Council Tax Reduction, more than one notice will be issued before Enforcement Agents visit the taxpayer.
- In the case of Business Rate default, debts may be issued to Enforcement Agents without a warning notice being issued.

7 Liability Orders and Enforcement Stages

7.1. Overriding Aims

- The Council's aim is always to collect any outstanding debt as efficiently and effectively as possible and will base any discretion as to methods of enforcement on this overriding aim.
- This aim will be balanced with ensuring that debtor's individual circumstances, where available, are considered.
- The previous conduct of a debtor will be taken into consideration when exercising discretion.
- The regulations only allow for one method of enforcement to be taken at any one time in relation to a single Liability Order. The Council will aim to use the most effective method at any point that debts remain outstanding.

7.2. Attachment of Earnings (Council Tax Debts only)

- If the details of the taxpayer's employment are known and an Attachment of Earnings Order is considered appropriate, we will make an Attachment of Earnings Order and serve it on the debtor's employer.
- The sums to be deducted are prescribed in the regulations and employers have a statutory obligation to comply with an Order.
- An employer may deduct £1.00 towards administrative costs on each occasion a deduction is made.
- Where the debtor has two or more unpaid liability orders the Council may request a maximum of two Attachment of Earnings Orders be initiated.
- Where alternative arrangements have been made but not adhered to, the recourse to enforce an Attachment of Earnings Order will be taken.
- If it is felt by a debtor that the deductions under the Attachment of Earnings Order will cause hardship, the debtor may apply to the Council for the deductions to be reviewed. This review will be undertaken on the basis of ensuring that any debts are collected as efficiently and effectively as possible.

7.3. Deductions from Benefits (Council Tax Debts Only)

- Where appropriate we will apply to the Department for Works and Pensions for deductions from Jobseeker Allowance or Income Support
- The Council can apply to the Job Centre Plus for deductions to be made from Universal Credit, Jobseeker Allowance, or Income Support but not from any other benefits.
- The Council Tax (Deductions from Income Support) Regulations 1993 specify the fixed weekly amount deductible which is 5% of the Universal Credit, Jobseeker Allowance or Income Support for a single person aged over 25.
- The fixed nature of the rate of deductions may render this method of recovery inappropriate, for example where the ongoing liability is greater than the deduction rate, or other means of recovering the debt are available.

7.4. Taking Control of Goods (formerly known as Levy of Distress)

- We will pass debts to Enforcement Agents (formerly known as bailiffs) to take control of debtors' goods, to enforce payment where it is felt that no alternative enforcement power is available or appropriate.
- Enforcement agents are required by law to undertake a compliance stage to encourage the debtor to engage, prior to visiting the debtor's home or place of business, or charging fees.

- Legislation permits the Enforcement Agent to charge statutory fees directly to the debtor. There is therefore usually no cost to the Council in this process.
- When a debt is referred to an Enforcement agent, we would expect the debtor to resolve payment of his arrears and associated fees with the agent. The Council will only intervene or withdraw a case from the Agent in exceptional circumstances, for example in the event of a Council error leading to the referral.
- The Council will from time to time, issue operating rules and a Code of Conduct to its Enforcement agents. The aim of these is to ensure that the agents operate fairly, proportionately and within the legal framework.
- We will always try to establish if a debtor is vulnerable, and act accordingly when this is the case. This will not ordinarily require the matter to be returned by the Agent. It is considered reasonable, at this stage for the Agent to require some form of proof or verification of the vulnerability and where this is provided, allow time for the debtor to seek the support needed to be able to deal with the Agent's visit.

7.5. Bankruptcy, Liquidation and Charging Orders

- Any amounts due can be deemed to be debts for the purposes of the Insolvency Act 1986 in relation to winding up limited companies or to petition for the bankruptcy of individual.
- We will engage the assistance of private sector specialists in this type of recovery action, when appropriate.
- We will generally, only consider personal bankruptcy after other recovery methods have failed. However, we will choose it sooner if information is received that suggests that by initiating bankruptcy proceedings, this be a more effective method of collection.
- Insolvency proceedings against companies may be preferable to attempting to take control of their goods, and this method will be deployed where it appears preferable, having regard to the size of the debt and the circumstances and conduct of the debtor.
- We will make reasonable efforts to ascertain if there are assets available prior to making a petition for bankruptcy or insolvency.
- Insolvency and bankruptcy proceedings will only be considered where the overall debt is over £5,000. The debt may be made up of debts other than Council Tax.
- Charging Orders will be applied for where £1,000 or more is owed and it is felt appropriate to do so, having regard for the amount of debt and circumstances of the debtor. These will generally be followed with applications for Orders for Sale. Again, private sector specialism may be procured in these cases.

The procedures to be followed in the case of Bankruptcy, Insolvency and Charging Orders are as below.

8 Insolvency (Bankruptcy and Winding Up proceedings)

Legal Requirements

The legal requirements are contained within the Insolvency Act 1986, as amended. Essentially, bankruptcy action can be taken against any debtor who owes in excess of £5,000 to creditors and who, for whatever reason, is unable to satisfy his creditors' claims in full.

In addition, a debtor may initiate action by petitioning for their own bankruptcy. Winding Up proceedings are used against Limited Companies.

Insolvency frees a debtor from overwhelming debts so they can make a fresh start, subject to some restrictions, and makes sure the assets belonging to the debtor are shared out fairly among all the creditors. However, the consequences can be severe and can involve the loss of the debtor's home or business and considerable legal and Trustee costs. The level of costs will reflect the complexity of the matters involved and the extent to which the debtor cooperates with the Trustee who is administering the estate.

Insolvency action takes place in the County Court or the High Court if the debtor resides in London.

8.1. Use of Specialists.

The Council will refer appropriate cases to a solicitor. Solicitors are fully authorised to deal with all matters connected with insolvency from the issue of the Statutory Demand to dealing with contested matters. Where appropriate a private sector specialist will be engaged to undertake the work on our behalf.

8.2. Circumstances where Insolvency Proceedings may be appropriate

- Where the debt exceeds £5,000 and the debtor has sufficient assets or equity to ensure the debt is recoverable by the Official Receiver or the Trustee.
- Where the debtor is not making regular and mutually agreed payments that are sufficient to clear accruing debt and the arrears within an acceptable timescale.
- Where insolvency action is considered most effective in recovering from a particular debtor.
- Where the debt has arisen as a result of fraud.
- Where specific assets cannot be identified but there are indicators that the debtor is one of high material worth for example, renting high value property/has a high salaried profession.

- Where bankruptcy action would encourage payment from specific groups of debtors where their credit rating is important to them, for example company directors, self-employed people and those people needing finance.
- Where debt is arising as a result of continuing default and facilitating occupation by another party would be beneficial to the Council's future Business Rate or Council Tax income.

8.3. Special Circumstances

If made aware of the following circumstances prior to a Bankruptcy Order being obtained, the Council will consider withdrawing proceedings in favour of alternative enforcement action.

- Where a debtor, as a result of age, severe mental illness, or serious learning difficulties, is vulnerable and cannot deal with their affairs.
- Where the debtor is currently in receipt of 100% Council Tax Reduction with no accruing debt and another method of recovery is considered to be more appropriate.

8.4. Consideration of Insolvency and Officers' Actions

A decision for the Council to begin bankruptcy proceedings will be made by the Principal Revenues Officer, Revenues Services Manager or Revenues and Benefits Manger.

As part of the consideration as to whether insolvency action is appropriate in an individual case, officers will consider the overall debt position, the financial position including income and equity, personal circumstances and the level of engagement including previous payment history.

The more information held about the debtor the more efficient the decision-making process will be in terms of selecting the most effective enforcement option. As part of the decision-making process the Council officer will seek to build a picture of the debtor and their circumstances and will achieve this in various ways, including some or all of the following activities. The list is not exhaustive.

- Demanding financial information in writing following a Liability Order being granted whilst stating bankruptcy is an option to be considered.
- Checking all Council Tax records and if possible, any other records to see if there is any reason bankruptcy would not be appropriate as a result of vulnerability issues.
- Checking with the Benefits Service to ensure that all Council Tax Benefit and Reduction due to the debtor has been posted to the Council Tax account and that their records do not indicate significant vulnerability issues.
- Checking H.M. Land Registry to confirm property assets.

- Checking with a Credit Reference Agency for information on outgoings, requests for finance, mortgages and other financial information.
- Checking known or potential employment details.
- Checking Benefit Overpayment records and Business Rates records (and including all debts in the bankruptcy action).
- Checking Companies House records for business information.

The Council may engage private sector practitioners or solicitors to undertake these checks and/or issue appropriate correspondence to the debtor.

9 Charging Orders

9.1 Legal Requirements

If the aggregated balance on Council Tax Liability Orders for a property is over £1,000 then an application may be made for a Charge to be placed on the same property only, to secure the debt owed to the Council. Charging Orders are not a method of enforcement in that the debt remains unpaid until the property is sold, and the Charge extinguished by the payment of the debt from the proceeds. The property may never be sold or not for a considerable time. If the debt is to be actively recovered then following a Charging Order being obtained, an application must be made to the Court for an Order of Possession and Order for sale.

Charging Orders may only be used for Business Rates debt with the agreement of the ratepayer and therefore such action will not be taken without the written consent of the ratepayer.

9.2 Use of solicitors.

The Council will refer appropriate cases to a solicitor. Solicitors are fully authorised to deal with applications for Charging Orders, Orders for Sale and Possession and contested matters. Where appropriate, private sector specialist assistance will be sought.

9.3 Circumstances where a Charging Order may be appropriate.

- Where the property is currently for sale voluntarily and a Charging Order is used as a way of securing the debt by agreement with the Council.
- Where the property is owned by a debtor who resides outside UK jurisdiction.
- Where a debtor, as a result of age, severe mental illness or serious learning difficulties cannot deal with their affairs.
- Where the debtor's whereabouts are unknown making service to allow bankruptcy action difficult.
- Where a payment arrangement has been agreed on the basis that the debt is secured via a Charging Order.

9.4 Decision Making

The number of cases is very small. The Revenues and Benefits Manager will consider each case on its own merits being mindful of all the facts and the level of arrears.

10 Committal Proceedings

Where Enforcement Agents have attempted to take control of an individual's goods and (for whatever reason) have been unsuccessful, the Council has the power to apply for committal to prison. This requires attendance at the Magistrates Court to enable a means enquiry to be conducted to see whether failure to pay is due to 'wilful refusal' or 'culpable neglect'.

The Council will only use this as a last resort. There will be many attempts to make arrangements and elicit payment, before reaching this stage, but in some cases, there is no alternative.

In the majority of cases where committal action is taken, there will have been persistent refusal or avoidance of payment and the Magistrates will be asked to impose a suspended sentence and order the taxpayer to make monthly or weekly payments.

Legal precedents exist that state that Magistrates should not commit forthwith without either considering alternatives or having made suspended orders to coerce payment. Once a suspended order has been made, debtors are obliged to pay as required by the order. If the debtor fails to pay, the Magistrates are entitled to remove the suspension and order that the debtor serves the sentence. In these cases, the Council will give debtors an opportunity to attend hearings to show cause why they have not paid. The term of imprisonment will not exceed three months for each Liability Order.

If the Magistrates decide that failure to pay was not due to wilful refusal or culpable neglect, they have the power to remit all or part of the debt. However, they are entitled to remit the debt, on the basis of inability to pay.

If a term of imprisonment is served, the relevant Council Tax will be written off as irrecoverable. Any part payment will reduce the term of imprisonment proportionally.

11 Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed and updated, from time to time, in order to ensure it remains valid, effective, and relevant. Updates that do not materially alter the aims or operation of this policy, for example changes to the underlying legislation, will be approved by the Local Taxation and Benefits manager in consultation with the cabinet Member(s) responsible for Council Tax and Business Rates.

Material changes to the policy will require further approval in accordance with the Council's Constitution.