

Dear Members

Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny Committee

A meeting of the Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny Committee will be held in the **Craddock Room, Civic Centre, Riverside Stafford** on **Tuesday 6 October 2026 at 6.30pm** 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.



Head of Law and Governance

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

6 OCTOBER 2026

Chair - Councillor F Beatty

AGENDA

- 1 Minutes of 2 July 2026 as previously published on the Council's website.
- 2 Apologies
- 3 Public Question Time - Anthony Stubbs:

Government guidance confirms that Section 97 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 gives a local planning authority power to modify or revoke an existing Permission in Principle. What is Stafford Borough Council's formal procedure for considering a Section 97 request, who has authority to determine it, what timetable applies, and will a reasoned written decision be provided?

- 4 Councillor Session - Nil

Page Nos

- 5 Members' Items

ITEM No 5(a) **Conclusion of Task and Finish Working Group (Evening Economy)** 4 - 11

Councillor D P Rouxel

- 6 Called In Items - Nil

- 7 Officers' Reports

ITEM NO 7(a) **Q1 Performance Report** 12 - 18

HEAD OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING

ITEM NO 7(b) **Stafford Town Centre Development Framework - Engagement Events Feedback and Next Steps** -

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND REGENERATION
MANAGER

ITEM NO 7(c) **Work Programme** 19 - 23

HEAD OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING

Membership

Chair - Councillor F Beatty

F Beatty	D M McNaughton
B M Cross	A Nixon
F D J James	M Phillips
P W Jones	J S Powell
B McKeown	D P Rouxel

Report of the Evening Economy Task and Finish Group

Author - Doug Rouxel

Date Completed - 18 September 2026

Introduction

This is the final report back on the views and perspectives which have been collated so far, encompassing qualitative interviews with both users, organisers, and businesses in the evening economy and the subsequent discussions with relevant council officers on specific points raised. This included qualitative interviews with

- A café proprietor (Soup Kitchen),
- Traditional evening-economy venues (music-led pubs),
- Restaurant businesses across Stafford Borough,
- Residents and visitors across age groups (20-25, 30-45, 55+),
- Long-running cultural organisers (folk/acoustic events and music festivals).

In addition to comparative insights from other similar towns (e.g. Lichfield, Cannock Chase) and then discussions with officers involved in the areas raised.

The responses position Stafford as a town with strong assets (heritage, events, audience appetite, low serious crime) but weak coordination, slow decision-making, and risk-averse systems, resulting in an underperforming evening economy.

Core Themes

Across the different contributions a number of themes emerge: the core challenge is not a lack of demand, but shortcomings in delivery and enablement. This is demonstrated by strong attendance at free public events, as well as by visitors travelling from regional, national, and occasionally international locations. There is strong repeat attendance at established activities such as Thursday markets, festivals, and heritage days, and restaurants and pubs report that between 70 and 80 per cent of their turnover is generated during evening hours.

Despite this evidence of demand, the town centre outside organised events, often feels quiet, fragmented, and under-used. Visitors frequently come for a single destination and leave rather than circulating between venues, limiting wider economic benefit. Businesses express reluctance to extend opening hours due to uncertainty, negative safety perceptions, transport and parking difficulties, and constraints associated with licensing and regulation.

Licensing and Regulation

Governance and process issues are identified as a significant barrier to effective delivery. Event approvals are reported to be slow and are alleged to sometimes occur only six to eight weeks before scheduled activities, which undermines planning and confidence. The specific guidelines which the council uses to event approval is as follows:

- Small events for less than 500 attendees - 8 weeks unless the event involves a road closure in which case a minimum of 3 months' notice is required
- Minor events for 500-1000 attendees require 3 months notification (even if the event does not include a road closure)
- Significant events for 1000-5000 attendees require 6 months notification
- Major events for more than 5,000 attendees require 9 months notification

However - these timelines are about how far in advance notification is required - which is when the application needs to be put in and doesn't give a specific timeline for when the decision will actually be made and the event approved.

As part of the conversations undertaken it is not clear if there is any specific guidance or targets for completing the application process. This is in many ways understandable - a good application with no issues might be very easy to process, and one which has elements missing or incomplete would take longer or would end up being rejected.

There are provisions for approving repeat events, and once strong relationships have been built the council is putting these into place.

It is possible that either a single point of contact, or a cross-cutting policy of enablement of specific types of events which are culturally and economically beneficial to the town, alongside publication of expectations (rather than targets) for timelines would be beneficial.

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One area which was specifically mentioned in the feedback was sitting out licences - that the evening economy of the town centre would be much improved if more places had them. Much of the preparatory work for this report was undertaken during the summer months, and the author was able to take a walk through the town centre to look at the different establishments which had seating outside and were therefore holders of sitting out licences. As part of a walk through on a Friday evening in July, almost every establishment on the high street, Market Square and the surrounds, and Staffordshire Place which had a suitable frontage for a sitting out had so. It would be difficult to identify an establishment without it. Therefore, it seems that this facility is well used, and the Borough is licensing them appropriately, otherwise there would be some places without permissions.

One area where there has been concerns raised with these licenses has come from a licensee, who had got in touch with Cllr Powell stating that there had been a change in the overall approach, and a tighter policing of the use of glassware in *sitting out* spaces, that they would be enforcing an all plastic and no glassware approach in outside spaces.

This distinction and approach are something which exemplifies the underlying differentiation which we are seeking to create with this report. If we look at the “evening economy” perspective - then we are looking at the time period from 5pm through to 10pm, and it is likely to be people buying fewer, more expensive drinks, attending events and activities, and on who on average are older. This contrasts with the “night time economy” which would tend towards being the “party crowd” probably arriving in town later, buying higher volumes of cheaper drinks and attending to engage in traditional “nightlife” activities - e.g. bars and clubs with recorded music. The latter is the overall focus - it is looked at through a lens of safety and management. What can be done to minimise the impact of this specific group of people. There is no wider consideration that this could have a detrimental economic impact on the separate and distinct “evening economy” element. There appears (although it is worthy of further investigation) to be a blanket approach to this recent change, and there could almost certainly be a much more nuanced approach taken around time cut-offs for example, rather than a blanket approach.

Transport and Access

When talking to people involved, transport and access issues are considered to play a major role in discouraging evening activity.

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Evening and weekend bus services are considered to be weak; this is demonstrably the case. It is often difficult to get a bus into town for an early evening activity and then get a bus back home unless you live within or close to the bounds of the M6 and ring road. If you want to get to and from Eccleshall or Gnosall to town and back on the bus to attend something in the evening, then it is not possible. This is more challenging for us to address as a Borough Council, it is however worth noting that it is a significant impediment, and perhaps something to feed into the County Councils ongoing work in this area.

There is a distinct concern that taxi availability can be unreliable, particularly midweek. This is an area which is entirely beholden to the market, and there are few, if any levers for the council to use to change this. It seems to stand to reason that a busier town centre, with more people wanting to use taxis, would also drive up the number of taxis working on any evening. So, in order to improve this it seems to be that improvement in other areas is needed to drive up the level of trade for drivers.

Parking

In the feedback which has been collected it was noted that there had been a loss of convenient evening parking and that the distance of remaining car parks from key venues created problems. It was suggested that long poorly lit walks from car parks are a particular deterrent for older audiences, performers, and those attending cultural events after dark. Parking is an area which is closely linked to planning, as well as the car parks which are directly overseen by the Borough in the main, so it is worth looking at the detail.

Stafford Town Centre has 1054 car parking spaces currently available. The data for payments made after 6pm has been provided to interrogate. Parking data isn't kept or interrogated to a highly granular level of detail, but this is an identifiable break point to use. Although not perfect, it gives a good indication of the level of usage of car parking facilities within the town in the evenings.

If we look at the overall quarterly usage after 6pm we can see some fairly obvious trends emerging, Q3 (which covers Christmas) and Q1 (which covers the summer months) are the highest, however, the overall occupancy for the quarter doesn't exceed 21%.

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Quarter	Number of Post 6pm Payments	Post 6pm payments as a % of the total spaces
Q1 2026/27	19318	20.1%
Q4 2025/26	17352	18.3%
Q3 2025/26	20352	21.0%
Q2 2025/26	15377	15.9%

If we consider this from the point of view of the day-by-day patterns of usage, then some obvious patterns emerge. A typical week usage varies from day to day, as you would expect, with Sunday being the lowest usage and Friday/Saturday the highest. The typical week used in this case is the week beginning 27 July.

	Number of Post 6pm payments	Post 6pm payments as a % of total spaces
Monday	145	13.8%
Tuesday	206	19.5%
Wednesday	203	19.3%
Thursday	182	17.3%
Friday	281	26.7%
Saturday	250	23.7%
Sunday	54	5.1%

This specific week is on the low side, roughly 10% under the average week for this quarter, but gives a good indication of the overall pattern - if we normalised this pattern over the week to represent the average usage over a single week from the quarterly data then the Friday evening usage would be just under 30% of capacity taken up by users paying after 6pm.

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What this data can tell us is that there is a mismatch between the perception of users that there is limited parking in the evenings and the reality that there is sufficient parking across the town centre. We can quite easily determine where this perception comes from - the car parking spaces which are more likely to be filled are those on South Walls, directly adjacent to Verso, The Liquor Tank, The Odeon and the Bowling Alley, and those on Broad Street adjacent to the old Wilko's building, which are generally considered to be the preferred parking spaces for the North end of Gaolgate Street, the Market Square and the Gatehouse Theatre.

The Waterfront is "never even close to full in the evenings" despite being only a tiny amount further than South Walls, which can fill up - the difference in the distance between the two is less than that of the front or the back of the Tesco car park.

If we compare the two furthest car parks, which are also those with the highest capacity, and map the routes to the most popular areas for the evening economy, the furthest distance to walk is roughly half a mile - from the Doxey Road car park to the Odeon, which isn't even the most optimal high-capacity car park for the Odeon. Aside from that journey, the longest distances between either of those car parks and any of the centres of the evening economy activity in the town centre is roughly a 0.4 mile walk. This suggests that the difficulties experienced in this case are rooted in the perception of some car parks being further away and less convenient when the differences are in many cases marginal at best. This can change substantially when we consider this from an accessibility perspective - walking 0.4 miles is very easy for many people to walk, but the difference between that and 0.3 miles might be substantial for others and the difference between going out and not, and this should certainly be a factor in our thinking and something to investigate in further detail.

The concerns that the walks are poorly lit, is something which it is difficult to quantify, however given that the Waterfront car park (which is not much further than any of the others, as noted) is possibly the best lit car park in the town centre, with a well-lit route to the high street this is difficult to reconcile and would need to be more closely investigated to fully understand the concerns, and something to consider as part of the Town Centre Masterplanning.

It may be that there are communication approaches which could be beneficial to encourage people to use the parking facilities which are substantially underused.

Planning

An area where there are definitely improvements coming down the road in Stafford town centre and the support for the evening economy is development and planning linked to the Town Centre Masterplan. When people are concerned that areas are poorly lit, or feel dangerous, then people living in those areas, and making the routes through town much more travelled and visible will have a significant impact on that.

In addition, there will just be more people in the town centre, and it will significantly contribute to the overall vitality of the town centre.

The masterplan needs executing alongside existing evening economy activities and done in a way which is sympathetic to the things which make our town centre lively and interesting to visit.

Recommendations

Reframe the Evening Economy Policy

Formally distinguish early evening (4pm-10pm) from late-night activity in council policy, licensing, and risk assessment. Apply proportionate controls to inclusive, early-evening uses.

Create a singular set of policy aims

Currently, there is no clear aim or objective which the disparate elements of work within the Borough Council which frame our towns evening economy work towards. Having a policy statement, which sets out the kind of thriving, culturally and economically productive evening economy we would like to see would provide those disparate areas with a broad template for decision making that would help them all pull in a singular direction.

Consider the evening economy in planning and development

Measures to be included in the ongoing work on the town centre should include:

- Improved lighting on key pedestrian routes
- Clearly signed evening parking and taxi drop-off points
- Consider the development of a supplementary planning document for the town centre which supports and protects the evening economy. Including consideration of higher standards acoustic isolation, alongside the above.

Strengthen Partnership Working

Create a regular, open, evening economy forum involving council officers and members, police, businesses, and organisers to move from procedural contact to genuine collaboration (assuming that the Town Centre Partnership and BID are not a possibility.)

Measuring success

This is a substantially challenging area - the best data collection for this would be costly and require considerable work on the part of the council.

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There are some things like the number of businesses in the evening economy, and how that has changed over time which would be useful. This was something which was requested, and the response was that there wasn't data held that could help without further analysis. The overall data wasn't shared with the author.

There is some data which seems to be much more accessible that could give strong indications of a healthier evening economy like looking at parking data.

The only other area would be looking at the change in sentiment from local businesses over time - if there were a regular discussion forum, even if it was once or twice a year, then it would be possible to gauge and measure sentiment from business and track that over time.

Priority Delivery Plan for 2026-27

Priority 1 - Prosperous Economy

Summary of Progress as at end of Quarter 1

			N/A	Total Number of Projects/Actions Due
Work completed	Work in progress but behind schedule	Work not yet started	Action not yet due	
2				2

Summary of Successes as at Quarter 1
• Approval of Stafford Town Centre Development Framework • New Local Plan timetable published in line with Government regulations

Summary of Slippage as at Quarter 1
None

Priority 1 - Prosperous Economy

Project	Actions and Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Progress Update	Symbol
Delivery of regeneration schemes	Stafford Town Centre Transformation						
	Progress delivery of Development Framework, identifying process for preferred development delivery option for cleared development sites	X				The Stafford Town Centre Development Framework and process for development partner selection was approved by Cabinet on 9 April. A further Cabinet report will set out the revised governance framework for the programme's delivery phase.	✓
	Develop wider masterplan/development framework for Stafford town centre		X				
	Stafford Station Gateway						
	Complete land acquisition			X			
	Commence delivery of Local Regeneration Fund activities				X		
	Agree preferred development delivery option for cleared development sites				X		

Project	Actions and Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Progress Update	Symbol
Launch of new Business Support programme	Implement new programme of targeted business support		X				
Economic Growth Strategy	Refresh Economic Growth Strategy			X			
Pipeline of projects	Develop pipeline of future economic development and regeneration projects			X			
Delivery of planning services to enable economic growth	Publish revised Local Development Scheme	X				New Local Plan timetable published 3 June 2026	✓
	Prepare New Local Plan and updated evidence base				X		
	Launch of Proposed Local Plan content & evidence (Regulation 23) consultation				X		
	Complete implementation of improvement plan for Development Management			X			

Priority Delivery Plan for 2026-27

Priority 3 - extract re Climate Change

Summary of Progress as at end of Quarter 1

			N/A	Total Number of Projects/Actions
Work completed	Work in progress but behind schedule	Work not yet started	Action not yet due	
			2	2

Summary of Successes as at Quarter 1
N/A

Summary of Slippage as at Quarter 1
No actions due

Project	Actions and Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Progress Update	Symbol
Local Plan with positive climate change policies	Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation study			X			
	Proposed Local Plan content and evidence (Regulation 23) consultation includes draft climate change and renewable policies				X		

KPIs for Priority 1 - Prosperous Economy

Symbol	Description	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	End of Year
	Performance on or exceeds target	4				
	Performance < 5% below target					
	Performance > 5% below target					
	TOTAL KPIs DUE TO BE REPORTED	4				

Priority 1 - Prosperous Economy

Indicator	Year End 25/26	Target 26/27	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Year End 26/27	Rating Symbol	Comments
Regeneration									
Employment rate (% relates to working age population (16-64) economically active i.e. in work or training)		80%					N/A	N/A	Annual figure released by ONS. Next data release from ONS 21 July 2026, therefore the 25/26 year-end figure will be reported in Q2.
Number of housing completions	612	749						N/A	Data not available until June 2026 Annual figure at year end (1 April 25 to 31 March 26)
Planning Services									
Major Planning Applications determined within time	66.5%	60%	100%					✓	10/10
Non-major Planning Applications determined within time	67.35	70%	90%					✓	117/130

Agenda Item 7(a)
Appendix 2

Major Planning Applications overturned at appeals as percentage of no. applications determined	1.94%	< 10%	0%					✓	
Non-major Planning Applications overturned at appeals as percentage of no. applications determined	66.5%	< 10%	3.85%					✓	

Agenda Item 7(c)

Work Programme - Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny Committee

Committee: Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny

Date of Meeting: 6 October 2026

Report of: Head of Law and Governance

Portfolio: Economic Development and Planning Portfolio

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present the Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the report be noted.

3 Key Issues

- 3.1 The first stage in achieving a Member-led Overview and Scrutiny process is to develop a Work Programme for the Members of the Committee to own.
- 3.2 Accordingly, an up-to-date copy of the Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme is provided for Members to consider or amend as appropriate.

4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 This report is most closely associated with the following Corporate Business Objective 1:-

To deliver sustainable economic and housing growth to provide income and jobs.

5 Report Detail

- 5.1 Members will recall that one of the fundamental philosophies behind the creation of Overview and Scrutiny is that the process should be Member-led and the first stage in achieving this is to develop a Work Programme that is:-
- Owned by all Members of the Scrutiny Committee
 - Flexible to allow the Committee to react to urgent items
 - Contain aspects of both Overview and Scrutiny
- 5.2 Therefore, at each scheduled meeting of the Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny Committee, an up-to-date copy of the Work Programme will be provided for Members to consider or amend as appropriate.
- 5.3 The Work Programme includes provision for the Committee to scrutinise appropriate items delivered through the Council's Service Delivery Plan up to twelve months in advance, whilst maintaining the flexibility to respond to any issues that may arise.
- 5.4 Accordingly, attached at **APPENDIX** is the Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny Committee's current Work Programme to consider or amend as appropriate.

6 Implications.

6.1 Financial

None

6.2 Legal

None

6.3 Human Resources

None

6.4 Risk Management

None

6.5 Equalities and Diversity

The Borough Council considers the effect of its actions on all sections and has addressed all of the following Equality Strands in the production of this report, as appropriate:-

Age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

6.6 Health

None

6.7 Climate Change

None

7 Appendices

Appendix: Work Programme

8 Previous Consideration

None

9 Background Papers

File available in Law and Governance

Contact Officer: Jackie Allen

Telephone Number: 01785 619552

Ward Interest: Nil

Report Track: Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny
Committee - 6 October 2026 (Only)

Key Decision: N/A

Appendix

Work Programme

Thursday 17 December 2026 at 6:30pm

Report Deadline: Wednesday 2 December 2026

Officer Reports: **Development Management Progress Review**

Head of Economic Development and Planning

Q2 Performance Report

Head of Economic Development and Planning

Conservation and Heritage Update

Conservation Officer

Pre-Application Service Update

Head of Economic Development and Planning

Work Programme

Head of Law and Governance

Tuesday 16 March 2027 at 6:30pm

Report Deadline: Monday 1 March 2027

Officer Reports: **Tourism Update**

Charlotte Cain - Visitor Economy Partnership Development
Manager

Q3 Performance Report

Head of Economic Development and Planning

Local Plan Update

Planning Policy Manager

**Updates from Annual Business Reports (feedback
from Water Authorities)**

Head of Economic Development and Planning

Work Programme

Head of Law and Governance

Future Items:

Development Strategy / Investment Prospectus

Biodiversity Net Gain Workshop

Rural Economy