

Stafford Borough New Local Plan Economic Development & Housing Needs Assessment (EDHNA) 2026 Addendum - September 2026

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2026

In August 2026, the Government published a new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)¹. The NPPF 2026 is a fundamental re-write of the national planning policy, making significant changes to the planning system, stressing the importance of the system being 'genuinely plan-led' in paragraph 2.

Paragraph 3 of the NPPF 2026 sets out that planning law requires applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. This includes national decision-making policies, that are to be 'read alongside the policies in the development plan.

This Stafford Borough Economic Development and Housing Needs Assessment (EDHNA) study was completed prior to the publication of the NPPF; but as outlined below there has been no update to the technical guidance to date (Planning Practice Guidance / PPG).

Economic Development

For economic development, the main practical effect is stronger national policy support for strategic employment uses, infrastructure-led growth and sectors aligned with the Government's UK Modern Industrial Strategy. The NPPF 2026 helps facilitate the move back to strategic planning and plan making after many years of trying to plan strategically via the local level 'duty to co-operate' process. Many economic users, most obviously larger industrial facilities, don't reflect local authority boundaries and operate more strategically.

However for the purpose of our assessment, for economic land uses, very little has changed – previous versions of the NPPF have long stressed that Councils should plan positively and seek to allocate sufficient economic land to meet their needs in full – relying on a reading of market signals to inform this.

Furthermore a positive approach to meeting the needs of strategic industrial users, including logistics, is well established in the West Midlands – the West Midlands Councils have a track record, dating back to before the abolition of the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) of commissioning and implementing strategic evidence. The West Midlands Strategic Sites Study was last updated in 2023/4 with a time horizon extending to 2045. That strategic work informed our assessment.

Offices remain a 'main town centre' use and should be directed to town centres, with boundaries reviewed to accommodate development where needed.

In a change from established practice new local plans need only look at a minimum 10 years ahead with the new strategic tier of Spatial Development Strategies looking at a minimum of 25 years. Whilst the minimum is recognised, it is advised that, at least for economic need, a longer period is considered. A longer period, with front loaded supply and periodic reviews provides significant flexibility for contingency and unforeseen shifts. With a 10 year plan period, additional contingency would likely be needed.

Whilst very little has changed with the NPPF 2026, there has not been, as of yet any amendments to the PPG. With no updated practice guidance, there is no updated method or more detailed advice to apply. Government has long stepped back from

¹ [National Planning Policy Framework - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/national-planning-policy-framework)

prescriptive guidance, with the exception of setting out the Standard Method for housing and closing down routes to challenge this.

Nevertheless, it is expected that some changes may be forthcoming.

Housing

As with any major piece of national policy, there are a number of inconsistencies and points that will be clarified through Local Plan Hearings and the appeal system in due course. A point that was debated at a recent Local Plan hearing was the relationship between the extant PPG and non-statutory policies HO1, HO5 and HO8 of the NPPF (August 2026). As with the economic side of the PPG, changes are likely to the housing guidance.

It is clear that it is necessary to disaggregate the need for housing by tenure and size, including for market housing, and this should be reflected in Local Plan policy linked to the evidence base. A land promoter argued that because Section 3 of decision-making policy HO8: Providing affordable homes says 'a flexible approach should be taken to the application of any development plan requirements relating to the number of bedrooms provided in market homes' the Council should not seek to impose a mix for market housing (the inspectors appeared unconvinced). Whilst this is just a small point it is illustrative of the debates that are likely to take place.

Summary

In summary; the direction of travel in the NPPF 2026 is largely unchanged. The positive direction for both housing and jobs already flowed from previous versions, and here there is a strong record of strategic scale economic evidence already informing local plans.

The main issue looking forward would appear to be related to any forthcoming changes to the PPG that may have consequences for the approach adopted in this study. This may need to be addressed through the updated EDHNA later in the plan-making process.