

Local Plan Update & Decision-Making Implications

Members Briefing - Presentation

14 July 2025



Progressing the New Local Plan

- March 2025: New Local Plan 2025 – 2045 started, with new timetable, adequate budget & resources to deliver evidence
- Since previous consultation on early draft New Local Plan: Preferred Options (Autumn 2022) major changes in national policy on Local Plan process & new housing requirements, as well as significant and high value feedback via the consultation process regarding proposed policies and sites
- Insufficient time, allocated budget and evidence base to secure a successful New Local Plan based on previous version, given new evidence base requirements for submission
- Based on current national planning policy important to complete this evidence base for New Local Plan and emerging Strategic Planning preparations
- Prior to adoption of New Local Plan, existing Plan for Stafford Borough must and will continue to be used for planning application decisions

Objectives

- New Local Plan & latest National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). We are not alone
- New mandatory local housing need target and the 5-year housing land supply position
- Plan for Stafford Borough 2011-2031 policy implications
- Applying the NPPF's presumption in favour of sustainable development to decision-making



Delivering the Evidence Base: On-going Work

Apr. 2025
onwards

- Economic & Housing / Gypsy Needs Assessment
- Town Centre Capacity Assessment
- Climate Change Adaptation Mitigation Study
- Playing Pitch & Sport Facilities Strategies
- Design Coding
- Infrastructure updates (transport, utilities)

Apr. 2026
onwards

- Landscape / Ecology / Historic Assessments
- Design Coding
- Whole Plan Viability Assessment
- SFRA & Water Cycle Study

Key Planning Changes to National Planning Policy Framework



Mandatory Housing Targets

5-year housing land supply calculation

New position & process for Plan-making

New Mandatory Housing Targets



Mandatory Housing Target

749 dwellings per year

14,980 over the plan period



Mandatory Housing Target + 10% delivery buffer

824 dwellings per year

16,480 over the plan period

Implications for Plan-Making



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

National Planning Policy Framework

December 2024

Mandatory Housing target of minimum 824 dwellings per year (10% delivery buffer applied required for plan-making)

Total minimum need for 16,480 homes over the plan period (2025 - 2045), to increase at 1 July 2026

Loss of 5-year housing land supply. Implications for adopted Plan and planning decisions

Progress through new Local Plan system, with further details in Summer 2025. Confirm timetable NPPF applies from 12 March 2025

5 Year Housing Land Supply Current Position + 5% buffer (as at 31 March 2025)

$$3,930 - 2,647 = 1,283$$

5 Year
Mandatory
housing
requirement

Current
housing supply
& projected
build out rates

Number of
Dwellings
needing consent
& delivered in
5 years

5 Year Housing Land Supply Position (as at 31 March 2025)

3.37 years' supply

Increase
planning
consents for
range of
housing sites

Continue
monthly
monitoring

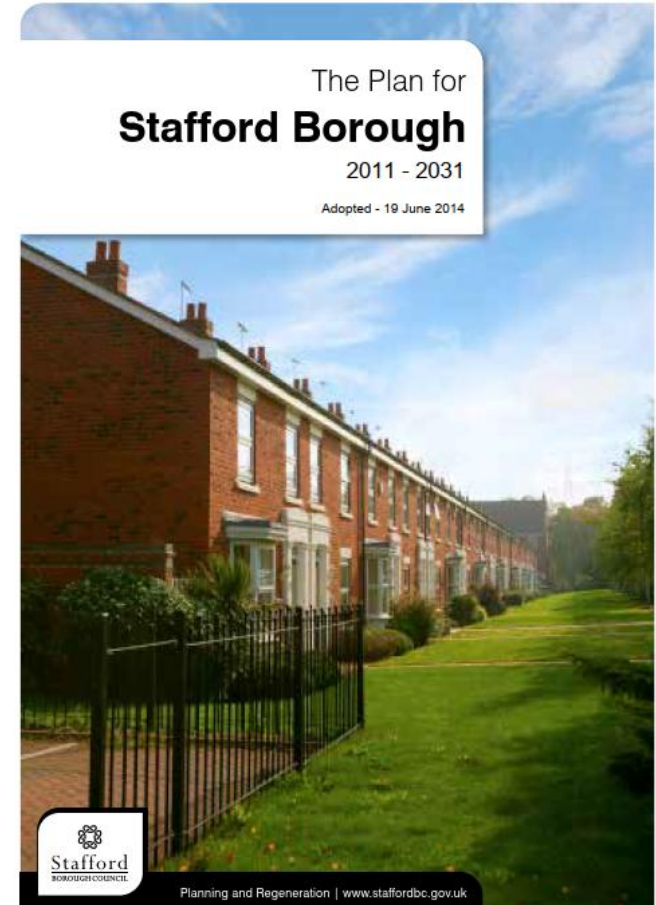
Assess
Housing Build-
Out Rates
using local
data

Implications of 5 Year Housing Land Supply



Role of Plan for Stafford Borough

- Legal status remains for making decisions on planning applications but 'out of date' for new housing development.
- NPPF paragraph 11 'tilted balance' on sustainable development applied as a material consideration.
- Settlement Boundaries carry less weight for new housing proposals – this means they can't be used as a reason to refuse planning permission.
- Other Local Plan Policies and the development strategy do still carry weight and can be used to improve / refuse a planning application.
- Development Management officer reports set out Local Plan latest policy position.



NPPF – Presumption in favour of Sustainable Development: The Tilted Balance (paragraph 11)

“Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development.
For decision-taking this means:

- c) Approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or
- d) Where there is no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission unless:
 - i) the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas of assets of particular importance⁷ provides a strong reason for refusing the development proposed; or
 - ii) any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole, having particular regard key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well-designed places and providing affordable homes, individually or in combination.”

Footnote 7 includes habitat sites, SSSIs, Green Belt, Local Green Space, National Landscape, designated heritage assets and flood risk areas.

Plan for Stafford Borough 2011-2031: Policy Implications

Out of Date Housing Policies

- Part of Spatial Principle 2 – Housing Provision element
- Part of Spatial Principle 7 – Location of New Development
- SB1 – Settlement Boundaries
- Unaffected = other Local Plan policies including the Development Strategy & Strategic Development Locations
- Continuing assessment involving DM & Policy officers

Settlement Boundaries

- Stafford Town
- Stone Town
- Key Services Villages
- 'Made' Neighbourhood Plan settlement boundaries
- Unaffected = Recognised Industrial Estate boundaries, Green Belt boundaries, Local Green Space designations in Neighbourhood Plans

Generic Examples of Housing Planning Applications



Example 1 – Application within settlement boundary of adopted Plan



Example 2 – Application outside but adjoining settlement boundary for a large scale site of new homes on greenfield site



Example 3 – Application within the Green Belt and adjoining a built up area for a medium scale site of new homes on greenfield land



Example 4 – Application within the Green Belt on previously developed land or grey belt land for a medium scale site of new homes



Example 5 – Application away from a settlement boundary in a high landscape area or nationally designated nature conservation site

What can we do?



Planning applications must still go through the same system as before, always to be considered on individual merits – case by case basis



We are introducing a pre-application process – to assist applicants when preparing planning applications.



Advise Members to direct site enquiries to Officers rather than engage with developers / landowners, to protect the process.



We will still use the majority of policies in the adopted Plan for Stafford Borough 2011-2031 and 'made' Neighbourhood Plans



We can use these policies to improve planning applications i.e. design
We can refuse applications – but need to have good reasons why alongside evidence where appropriate

How can we respond effectively?



Senior Planning Officer vacancy recently filled internally



1 Development Management (DM) case officer with experience of handling large scale major applications



3 other DM case officers with some experience of dealing with smaller major applications



We don't know when applications will be submitted



If we get more than 5 or 6 major housing applications for processing at the same time will need to bring in additional resource

Lessons from Planning Appeals

The lack of a 5-year supply means refusing planning applications is harder but not impossible

When planning applications are refused, they can be appealed. Significant risk of losing appeals with costs, by lack of evidence

Many applications where planning consent was refused on policies, related to settlement boundaries, open countryside etc.. Planning Inspectors often determined in favour of the applicant i.e. permission was granted, consider each case on its merits

Planning appeals have been 'won' by the Local Planning Authority based on special areas of landscape, character of landscape, nationally important sites / ecology

What happens now?

Plan-making: Assess the evidence base and implications of new mandatory housing target figure of minimum 824 dwellings per year (16,480 new homes over the plan period)

Note loss of 5-Year Housing Land Supply for plan-making and decision-taking, leading to additional new planning applications / appeals, and increased community concerns

Continue to use the adopted Plan for Stafford Borough but NPPF presumption in favour of sustainable development now applied for plan-making & decision taking

Due to the scale of new development required, to note the latest position and ensure a sufficient supply of housing consents are secured through the DM process.