

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 **Thursday 11 January 2024 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

11 JANUARY 2024

Chair - Councillor F Beatty

AGENDA

- 1 Minutes of 14 November 2023 as previously published on the Council's website.
- 2 Apologies
- 3 Public Question Time - None
- 4 Councillor Session - None
- 5 Members' Items - None
- 6 Called In Items - None

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HEAD OF LAW AND GOVERNANCE	

Membership

Chair - Councillor F Beatty

J A Barron	D M McNaughton
F Beatty	M Phillips
B M Cross	J S Powell
P C Edgeller	J P Read
A R McNaughton	D P Rouxel

Agenda Item 7(b)**New Local Plan 2020-2040 Update**

Committee:	Economic Development and Planning
Date of Meeting:	11 January 2024
Report of:	Head of Economic Development and Planning
Portfolio:	Economic Development and Planning Portfolio

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update the Committee on the current position of the new Local Plan 2020 - 2040 and associated documentation including responses received to the Preferred Options consultation, latest evidence based information and the Local Development Scheme, proposed changes to National planning policy and key elements of the emerging new Development Plan.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the report be noted.

3 Key Issues

- 3.1 It is important for the Borough Council to make progress on the New Local Plan for Stafford Borough 2020-2040 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 continues to be 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 The new Local Plan 2020-2040 is currently progressing through the key stages of the plan-making process, having recently completed the Preferred Options stage in October to December 2022. Officers are in the process of reviewing and assessing the Local Plan implications of responses received through the public consultation at Preferred Options. The responses have highlighted several factors that will have implications for the new Local Plan, in particular the requirement to source further work to create a sound

evidence base for the Meecebrook proposals, as well as concern regarding the provision of additional dwellings for unmet need from the region as part of the future Stafford Borough development strategy.

- 3.4 Alongside the responses to the Preferred Options consultation, the Government has announced potential changes to National planning policy, together with updates in September and December 2023. Furthermore, as a result of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, in October 2023, secondary legislation is now required in order to deliver these changes which will impact Local Plans and plan-making, by introducing a new plan-making process, as well as amending some of the current requirements for Local Plans, including the abolishment of the Duty-to-Cooperate.
- 3.5 The responses from the Preferred Options consultation, as well as the proposed changes to National planning policy, present implications for next steps and the development of the new Stafford Borough Local Plan 2020-2040. The report sets out these implications in further detail, which will need to be considered in order to progress the new Local Plan, in particular, the level of future growth for Stafford Borough, and plan-making timescales.
- 3.6 Plan-making timescales will also play a key role in the assessment of the options for next steps of the new Local Plan. Due to the further work needed for the new Local Plan, it is anticipated that it will be progressed under the proposed new plan-making system, if the deadline dates put forward by the Government remain as currently proposed.

4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 The New Local Plan will help deliver the Council's Corporate Business Plan 2021-2024 key objectives:

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

"To improve the quality of life of local people by providing a safe, clean, attractive place to live and work and encouraging people to be engaged in developing strong communities that promote health and wellbeing."

"To continue work towards our Climate Change and Green Recovery objectives, integrating them into our activities and strategic plans"

"To be a well-run, financially sustainable and ambitious organisation, responsive to the needs of our customers and communities and focussed on delivering our objectives."

5 Report Detail

New Local Plan stages

- 5.1 The adopted Plan for Stafford Borough (June 2014 and Part 2 in January 2017) covers the period 2011-2031. Councils must review their Local Plans at least once every five years from the adoption date to ensure that policies remain relevant and effectively address the needs of the local community.
- 5.2 In March 2012 the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published, and subsequently updated in February 2019, July 2021, September 2023 and December 2023. Alongside updates to the NPPF was additional information provided via Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), which sets out the national context for preparing policies in new Local Plans. The purpose of planning was re-stated being to 'achieve sustainable development', with this approach amplified through core planning principles and a general approach requiring that Local Plans should bring forward sufficient land of a suitable quality in appropriate locations to meet objectively assessed needs.
- 5.3 Stafford Borough Council began the process of making the new Stafford Borough Local Plan in July 2017 which will update and replace the adopted Local Plan and cover the period 2020-2040.
- 5.4 The Borough Council previously consulted on a New Local Plan Issues and Options report between February and April 2020, extended due to the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. A total of 181 responses were received through this consultation stage and which are available to view on our website www.staffordbc.gov.uk/new-stafford-borough-local-plan-2020-2040-issues-and-options-responses.
- 5.5 The following key areas of work have been completed or are on-going since the New Local Plan process commenced:
 - Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report published and consulted upon
 - Settlement Assessment questionnaire to Parish Councils processed
 - On-going 'Call for Sites' exercise launched including in respect of new development, brownfield land and Local Green Space
 - Authority Monitoring Report published and evidence gathering from key stakeholders, including confirmation of a 5-year housing land supply
 - Analysis of the revised National Planning Policy Framework to reflect local implications for the New Local Plan process
 - Scoping the Issues Report alongside the Settlement Assessment methodology and the associated settlement profiles
 - Issues and Options consultation stage supported by a detailed evidence base leading to over 180 individual responses being submitted and published

- Evidence based reports published to support the Preferred Option stage from October to December 2022 resulting in over 540 individual responses being received, including an assessment of site based ecological, heritage and landscapes issues alongside transport, utilities and education provision. Furthermore, in October 2020 the Borough Council published the Staffordshire County Climate Change and Mitigation study
- Borough Council response to a range of Government consultations on planning reforms and changes to the existing planning system from August 2020 onwards

5.6 The plan-making process consists of several key stages. Council's must set out target dates for meeting them in a Local Development Scheme (LDS). Stafford Borough's LDS was published in October 2022 (Table 1) and will need to be updated. It should be noted that the Publication stage of the new Local Plan has not taken place, in order to provide the most up to date evidence based information, and ensure future consultations reflect the latest National Planning Policy Framework and guidance.

Table 1 - Local Development Scheme

Key Stage	Target Date
Commencement	July 2017: Stage completed
Issues and Options	July 2018 - April 2020: Stage completed
Preferred Options	October 2022 - December 2022: Stage completed
Publication	July - September 2023
Submission	November 2023
Examination	February 2024
Adoption	October 2024

5.7 As shown in the Local Development Scheme, before a new Local Plan can be adopted, it must go through an examination process administered by the Planning Inspectorate National Service (PINS). The examination will assess whether the new Local Plan has been prepared in accordance with legal and procedural requirements, and if the document is sound. The new Local Plan must therefore be:

- Positively prepared - providing a strategy which meets at a minimum the area's objectively assessed needs, and where practical can accommodate unmet need from neighbouring areas through the Duty-to-Cooperate.
- Justified - have an appropriate strategy, considering the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence.
- Effective - deliverable over the plan period.
- Consistent with national policy.

Current stage of the new Local Plan - Preferred Options

5.8 The new Local Plan completed the Preferred Options stage of the plan-making process in December 2022. The Preferred Options document, which constitutes a draft new Local Plan, includes new draft policies and sets out how many new dwellings and how much new employment land is to be delivered between 2020-2040, as well as identifies proposed sites where new homes, employment and other facilities could be located.

5.9 To calculate how many new dwellings and how much new employment land is to be delivered through the new Local Plan, different growth scenarios were considered using the Economic and Housing Development Needs Assessment (EHDNA). The Preferred Options document adopts a high growth scenario and proposes a development strategy of 535 new dwellings to be delivered per year, totalling 10,700 new dwellings over the Plan period, as well as at least 80 hectares of new employment land.

5.10 To meet the proposed housing and employment figures, the new Local Plan set out proposed site allocations, which went through a site assessment process, as outlined in the Site Selection Topic Paper published alongside the Preferred Options document. Any new development will need to demonstrate that it is deliverable through an up-to-date and sound evidence base, including infrastructure requirements, as well as viability assessments. Included in the proposed site allocations is a new garden community, Meecebrook, which within the Preferred Options is identified to deliver 3,000 new dwellings, as well as 15 hectares of new employment land over the plan period, with a further 3,000 new dwellings to be delivered after 2040 outside the scope of the new Local Plan.

Preferred Options consultation responses

- 5.11 As part of the Preferred Options stage of the plan-making process, the Preferred Options document was subject to public consultation, with responses to the consultation being considered when preparing the Publication version of the new Local Plan. The consultation took place between October and December 2022. In total, 541 individual responses were received to the Preferred Options consultation, which were published in February 2023.
- 5.12 Officers continue to assess the implications of the responses, and summaries will be provided in due course. There are a number of general themes to the consultation responses, with key issues raised including:
- The evidence base requirement for further work towards developing an up-to-date and robust evidence base for the Meecebrook proposals;
 - the proposed number of 10,700 new dwellings to be delivered during the Plan period is too high; and
 - concerns over the approach to deliver 2,000 new dwellings for unmet housing need for the region.

Changes to National planning policy

- 5.13 The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 includes a number of changes to the planning system and the plan-making process. On 13 December 2023 a Written Ministerial Statement set out that the Government will not expect plan-makers to set local energy efficiency standards for buildings that go beyond current or planned buildings regulations. Furthermore on 19 December 2023 an updated National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published. The implications on the Local Plan and details will be shared in due course.
- 5.14 In terms of plan-making and for the purpose of this report the following proposed changes should be noted:
- A new plan-making process will be introduced. New plans to be completed within 2 ½ years and include effective and enhanced community engagement protocols. Any new plans that are prepared from Autumn 2024 must be made through the new plan-making process. Any plans that are currently progressing through the existing plan-making system must be submitted for Examination by 30 June 2025 or will be subject to restarting a new plan under the new plan-making process. There is currently no further information with regard to transitional arrangements for Council's that decide to use the new plan-making process.

- An advisory Local Housing Need target is to be used to underpin Local Plans provided by the Government. Local authorities can bring forward an alternative target if it can be justified through evidence base and local circumstances. The over-delivery of housing provision in a previous Plan can be rolled forward and used to reduce targets if required.
- The Duty to Co-operate legal requirement for Local Plans will be abolished, which will be replaced with an Alignment Policy.

Next steps

- 5.15 For Stafford Borough Council, the next key stage of the new Local Plan process is identified as being the preparation of the Publication version and consultation, as shown in the Local Development Scheme.
- 5.16 However, there are a number of issues with the new Local Plan in its current form. As raised in the consultation responses, there are concerns that there is currently insufficient evidence to support the Meecebrook proposals. There are also concerns that there is a lack of justification for the provision of 2,000 dwellings to be provided as unmet need under the Duty-to-Cooperate. There is a need to address these concerns and issues going forward by further developing the evidence base for the Local Plan and reviewing the proposed site allocations, to ensure that the Local Plan is in a position to pass the required tests of soundness at Examination.
- 5.17 Furthermore, the proposed changes to National planning policy suggest that there will no longer be a requirement to provide unmet need from other areas, that housing targets for the provision of new dwellings can be amended by Local Authorities if justified, and that over-delivery of housing provision in recent years can be used to reduce the target number of new dwellings.
- 5.18 The Cabinet are continuing to assess the most appropriate way forward concerning the new Local Plan, which will need to reflect proposed changes to National Planning policy once these are confirmed.

6 Implications

6.1 Financial

The exercise of formulating a new Local Plan was allocated a total budget of £536,000 in July 2017. Following delays and the impact of the pandemic, an additional £204,950 has been identified as being required to meet revised anticipated costs. Due to the delay, £162,500 of this increase has been funded from the Council's annual contributions of £32,500 per annum, together with £30,000 to cover additional costs relating to the pandemic. This leaves a balance of £12,450 to be funded. This outstanding balance has been allocated monies in principle from the planning fee reserve. Delivery of the

New Local Plan is envisaged to come within the revised resources available as outlined above and in the table below.

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

The financial implications of updating the New Local Plan programme through the Local Development Scheme are that funds will now be spent in subsequent financial years than previously planned. Please refer to the table below.

Local Plan Revised Budget

	Original Plan July 2019 £	Revised Plan Dec 23 £	Variance £
2017/18 (Actual Expenditure)	0	36,367	36,367
2018/19 (Actual Expenditure)	54,700	54,734	34
2019/20 (Actual Expenditure)	162,200	170,000	7,800
2020/21 (Actual Expenditure)	118,100	26,667	-91,433
2021/22 (Actual Expenditure)	75,000	54,559	-20,441
2022/23 (Actual Expenditure)	100,000	36,832	-63,168
2023/24	0	6,260	6,260
2024/25	0	94,730	94,730
2025/26		143,410	143,410
2026/27		117,390	117,390
Contingency	26,000	0	-26,000
Total	536,000	740,949	204,949

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. The Preferred Options stage is not a statutory requirement but follows good practice guidance and has helped to inform the development of the statutory Publication version of the Local Plan to be formally consulted upon in due course.

6.3 Human Resources

The New Local Plan will be delivered by existing staff from within the Development Service 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 Government legislation, regulations and policy
- 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 Government legislation, regulations and policy as part of updating the Local Plan whilst deploying robust programme management techniques to deliver evidence 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 2020-2040 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 2020-2040 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 2020-2040 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 2020-2040 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 2020-2040 are made available.

7 Appendices

None

8 Previous Consideration

None

9 Background Papers

File available in Economic Development and Planning

Contact Officer:	Alex Yendole
Telephone Number:	07800 619530
Ward Interest:	Nil
Report Track:	Economic Development and Planning - 11 January 2024 (Only)
Key Decision:	N/A

Agenda Item 7(c)

Meecebrook Garden Community

Committee: Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny

Date of Meeting: Thursday 11 January 2024

Report of: Head of Economic Development and Planning

Portfolio: Economic Development and Planning Portfolio

1 Purpose of Report

1.1 To update Committee on progress made in relation to the development of the Meecebrook Garden Community.

2 Recommendation

2.1 That the report be noted.

3 Key Issues

3.1 This report sets out the main updates that have occurred since a general summary of progress was provided at the November Committee via Delivery Plan reporting for Quarter 2 2023/24.

4 Relationship to Corporate Business Objectives

4.1 Meecebrook Garden Community currently supports delivery of all four Business Objectives in the Council's Corporate Business plan 2021-2024. It also delivers against Growth Priority 2 in the Economic Growth Strategy for Stafford Borough 2020-2025.

5 Report Detail

5.1 Meecebrook Garden Community is included as specific new settlement within the Local Plan Preferred Option, with 3,000 homes to be provided within the plan period, with potential development beyond the plan period to provide an overall total of at least 6,000 homes. Following Garden Community status being awarded in 2019, a total of £1.44 million has been secured from Homes England (HE) to support the development of the technical evidence relating to the development.

- 5.2 The current work programme for Meecebrook is centred on the completion of a Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) relating to rail station options to support rail provision for the settlement and the development of a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) which will support health and well-being becoming integrated within the development with a focus on maximizing positive health effects and minimizing negative health effects.
- 5.3 The SOBC commission is being completed on behalf of the Meecebrook Programme Board by SLC with the full cost of the contract being met by secured HE funding. A completed draft was initially received by Stafford Borough Council (SBC) in late summer 2023. The review process of the draft was extensive, it involved Officers from Economic Development and Planning and benefited from input from a range of retained technical consultants who are supporting the development of the Garden Community.
- 5.4 Whilst the draft was being discussed and considered, two key strategic changes occurred. Network Rail (NR) published their Strategic Plan for the West Coast Mainline (WCLM) which directly referenced Meecebrook Garden Community, furthermore Central Government announced the cancellation of the northern section of High Speed 2 (HS2) connecting Birmingham to Manchester.
- 5.5 These two fundamental changes to the strategic context of rail provision have resulted in the requirement for an additional review and consideration of the draft SOBC.
- 5.6 A second draft was received by SBC week commencing 4 December 2023 and is currently being reviewed by Officers. It is envisaged that a completed document will be available for consideration by March 2024. A cost submission covering the additional work was received at the end of December 2023 and is currently being considered by Officers. It should be noted that the overall Meecebrook Programme carries a contingency sum and as such there are no financial implications to SBC relating from amended scope of the commission.
- 5.7 During 2023 with the support of Staffordshire County Council, Meecebrook Garden Community has engaged with a wide range of stakeholders through focused groups and workshops to develop a detailed HIA. Work will continue during 2024, the focus will be on collating and presenting the research in a format that can be accessed and utilised by future technical evidence.
- 5.8 As noted in a separate report to Committee, the timetable for the preparation of the new Local Plan 2020-2040 is currently being reviewed by officers, taking account of changes to National Planning Policy and consultation responses received during the Preferred Options consultation which took place between October and December 2022.

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

None

6.6 Health

None

6.7 Climate Change

None

7 Appendices

None

8 Previous Consideration

None

9 Background Papers

File available in Economic Development and Planning

Contact Officer: Michelle Smith

Telephone Number: 01785 619 335

Ward: Eccleshall

Report Track: Economic Development and Planning 11/01/24 (Only)

Key Decision: No

Agenda Item 7(d)

Work Programme - Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny Committee

Committee: Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny

Date of Meeting: 11 January 2024

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:

8 Previous Consideration

None.

9 Background Papers

File available in Law and Governance.

Contact Officer: Ian Curran

Telephone Number: 01785 619220

Ward Interest: Nil

Report Track: Economic Development and Planning - 11 January 2024
(Only)

Key Decision: N/A

Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 5 March 2024 at 6.30pm

Report Deadline

Wednesday 21 February 2024

Officer Reports:

Biodiversity Net Gain Duty

Head of Economic Development and Planning

Business and Leisure Tourism (Grants)

Head of Economic Development and Planning

Performance Update

Head of Transformation and Assurance

Development Management Performance Update

Head of Economic Development and Planning

Work Programme

Head of Law and Governance

Future Items:

Task and Finish Review - Events and Activities held in Stafford Town Centre/Parks;
Early 2024

Task and Finish Review - Section 106