

Stafford Borough New Local Plan 2020-2040

Stakeholder Engagement Plan – “Issues and Options” Stage Consultation

1 Background

1.1 It is a cornerstone of the planning system that communities and stakeholders should be able to influence the matters addressed in planning policy. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) published in July 2018 and revised in February 2019 reinforces the importance of involving local people in paragraph 15:

“The planning system should be genuinely plan-led. Succinct and up-to-date plans should provide a positive vision for the future of each area; a framework for addressing housing needs and other economic, social and environmental priorities; and a platform for local people to shape their surroundings.”

1.2 Even at this early stage of the New Stafford Borough Local Plan’s preparation it is worth re-iterating (NPPF, para 35), that for the Plan to be eventually found sound by an independent inspector sound it must be:

- **Positively prepared** – providing a strategy which, as a minimum, seeks to meet the area’s objectively assessed needs, and is informed by agreements with other authorities, so that unmet need from neighbouring areas is accommodated where it is practical to do so and is consistent with achieving sustainable development;
- **Justified** – an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence;
- **Effective** – deliverable over the plan period, and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic matters that have been dealt with rather than deferred, as evidenced by the statement of common ground; and
- **Consistent with national policy** – enabling the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in the NPPF.

Effective consultation is an important tool in demonstrating these important issues.

2 Approach to “Issues and Options” Consultation

2.1 In accordance with **Regulation 18** (Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012), Stafford Borough’s New Local Plan 2020-2040 “Issues and Options” document will be published for consultation in early 2020.

2.2 The “Issues and Options” consultation will take place in early 2020 .

- *Scope of Consultation* – the Issues and Options Consultation Document to be consulted upon in February - March 2020. The range of topics include the Vision and Objectives of the Plan, Climate Change, the Development Strategy, Delivering Economic Prosperity, Town Centres, Housing, Quality of the Environment, Health and Well Being and Connections.
- *Timing of Consultation* - 3 February – 12 noon on 31 March 2020.

2.3 The timing of the “Issues and Options” consultation is in line with the latest Local Development Schedule (Sept. 2019).

- 2.4 It is intended that the “Issues and Options” consultation will encourage representations from a wide range of individuals and organisations (detailed later in this paper). These representations will inform and enhance the Council’s subsequent preparation of the next stage (i.e. the “Preferred Option” document) and beyond.
- 2.5 To accompany the “Issues and Options” document a range of evidence base documents will also be published. These will include the: Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment; Economic and Housing Development Needs Assessment; Town Centre Capacity Assessment; Strategic Flood Risk Assessment; Settlement Assessments (published in July 2018 with the Scoping the Issues consultation) and Strategic Development Site Options study along with the initial stage Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessment. These are detailed in full and can be accessed via the “Issues and Options” consultation webpage <https://www.staffordbc.gov.uk/new-local-plan->.

3 Adopted “Statement of Community Involvement” Requirements

- 3.1 Stafford Borough Council adopted its latest Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) in November 2018 which reflects the latest legislation and requirements placed on local authorities. The SCI sets out the Council’s policy for involving the community in the planning process. It also details how the Council intends to involve all sections of the community, and provides guidelines and minimum standards to involve the community, interest groups and stakeholders in the production of Local Development Documents. The statement provides guidance on:
 - How people will have the chance to make representations on the draft Local Plan, and the process for considering and responding to their views;
 - The Examination in Public;
 - How the Borough Council will keep the community informed on progress and outcomes.

- 3.2 At this stage of the Local Plan preparation the SCI states that the following methods of engagement will be used:
 - Letters and emails;
 - Parish Forum meeting;
 - Public exhibition and workshop(s);
 - Press Release/Notice;
 - Libraries;
 - Council website.

- 3.3 The SCI states that the minimum period of consultation will be six weeks, although this may be lengthened to take account of holiday periods etc. The “Issues and Options” consultation period (Monday 3 February to Tuesday 31 March 2020) is approximately eight weeks.

4 The Duty to Cooperate

- 4.1 The Duty to Cooperate was created in the Localism Act 2011, and amends the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. It places a legal duty on local planning authorities, county councils in England and certain other public bodies to engage constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis to maximise the

effectiveness of Local Plan preparation in the context of strategic cross boundary matters.

- 4.2 In order to fulfil the requirements of the Duty to Cooperate all neighbouring authorities and consultation bodies covered by the Duty to Cooperate will receive a notification of the consultation. This will allow any concerns to be raised and will provide an audit trail to demonstrate that the Duty has been fully considered and complied with. Where cross-boundary issues are identified, officers will offer to meet with each of the neighbouring authorities or organisations concerned to discuss the issues and how the Plan can best address them. In line with NPPF requirements, Statements of Common Ground will be prepared where necessary.

5 Targeting Consultation and Methods

- 5.1 The Council will actively seek to engage community groups within Stafford Borough. Local planning authorities are required to consult specific bodies which they consider may have an interest in the proposed Local Plan document and other consultation bodies which they consider appropriate. A list of the consultees for Stafford Borough Council is set out in the Appendices of the SCI.
- 5.2 It is proposed to consult in a variety of ways. During the “Issues and Options” consultation periods there will be drop-in sessions in Stafford Town, Stone, Eccleshall and Hixon.
- 5.3 The drop in events will be supplemented by mini-poster displays in a wide range of accessible locations throughout Stafford Borough, and a non technical summary version of the main “Issues and Options” document will also be made available. A press release will be circulated to the local newspapers and radio stations. All Town and Parish Councils will be invited to a Forum event, and will be sent a consultation notice and be asked to display it on their notice boards.

6 Involving Harder-to-reach Groups

- 6.1 Within the Borough there are groups which are ‘hard to reach’ through consultations. The Borough Council recognises that these groups, in particular, may have different levels of access to information and therefore may find it harder to get involved in the decision-making process. In particular, the Borough Council will employ the following methods for engaging hard to reach groups (detailed at 6.2):
- Use of social media to raise awareness;
 - targeted invitations for involvement via educational establishments, faith groups and voluntary sector groups;
 - drop-in sessions at public locations.

7 Drop-in Sessions

- 7.1 During the eight-week public consultation on the “Issues and Options” document a number of drop-in sessions will be held. These will be staffed at highly accessible public locations in Stafford, Stone, Eccleshall and Hixon. Display boards will be erected at the drop-in sessions and copies of the Issues and Options document will be made available for public viewing along with other materials. Staff will also be on hand to answer any queries raised by the public.

7.2 *Location of Drop-in Sessions*

Date	Time	Venue
Monday 24 February	4pm-8pm	Jubilee Room, Eccleshall Community Centre
Weds 26 February	4pm-7pm	Hixon Memorial Hall
Saturday 29 February	12 noon – 4pm	Stafford Central Library
Tuesday 3 March	4pm – 8pm	Westbridge Room, Christchurch, Stone

7.3 Council officers will be present at the drop-in sessions to answer questions and discuss the document.

7.4 *Poster Displays*

The Council will request that posters are displayed at the following locations throughout the duration of the Issues and Options consultation as well as on Parish Council noticeboards:

- Stafford Library
- Stone Library
- Eccleshall Library
- Gnosall Library
- Baswich Library
- Blythe Bridge Library
- Parish Council Notice Boards.

Stafford

- Stafford Borough Civic Centre
- Stafford Leisure Centre
- Oddfellows
- Gatehouse Theatre
- Tesco Superstore
- Sainsburys Superstore
- Asda Superstore

Stone

- Stone Leisure Centre
- Aldi
- Morrisons
- Marks and Spencers
- Co-op in Walton
- Frank Jordan Community Centre
- Stone Station Community Centre
- Stone Town Council offices

Eccleshall

- Co-op
- Eccleshall Community Centre

Gnosall

- Grosvenor Community Centre

- Co-op

In the rural areas a variety of shops, post offices, community centres and other local facilities will be approached to display a poster.

8 Publishing on the Web

8.1 The full Issues and Options documentation, including the evidence base and other supporting material will be available via the Stafford Borough Council website.

8.2 The Borough Council will also use social media (Twitter and Facebook) to promote the consultation period and the drop-in sessions.

9 Commenting on the Local Plan Issues and Options Documents

9.1 An eight-week consultation for the Issues and Options document will commence on Monday 3 February 2020, with a closing deadline of 12 noon on Tuesday 31 March 2020 for responses.

9.2 Late responses for the Issues and Option consultation will be deemed “not duly made”.

9.3 In order to assist respondents in communicating their views and facilitate quicker analysis of responses by the Council, an online response form is available. All respondents are encouraged to use this form.

9.4 For any planning-related consultation (whether this is about wider strategy, large scale strategic allocations or small sites) only certain issues (known as Material Planning Considerations) can be considered. These include (amongst other things relevant to land use planning):

- National and local planning policies
- Government and Planning Inspectorate requirements
- loss of light
- landscaping
- capacity of physical infrastructure
- highway issues
- loss or effect on trees
- other environmental issues such as flooding, architecture, historic conservation
- adverse impact on nature conservation.

There are however a range of other issues that *cannot* be taken account of. These include factors such as:

- loss of property value
- loss of private views
- problems arising from the construction period of any works
- boundary disputes
- issues relating to the identity of a landowner or other individuals

10 Processing of Comments – Procedures

- 10.1 All consultation responses submitted to the Borough Council by email or post will be acknowledged within five working days of their receipt. After the Issues and Options consultation period ends, the Forward Planning Team will consider all of the consultation response forms received during the consultation period. This material will be summarised and will be subsequently considered during the preparation of the “Preferred Options” document. A Consultation Summary Report will be prepared which will detail the key issues raised within the response forms received.
- 10.2 The Consultation Summary Reports will be made available for public viewing on the Council’s website alongside the publication of the Preferred Options documentation.