
**STAFFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
& STAFFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL**

GROWTH POINT

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST



Staffordshire
County Council

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE OF STAFFORD

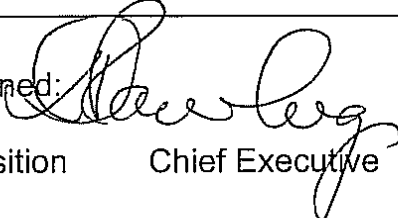
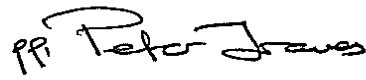
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this document is to set out the expression of interest from Stafford Borough Council and Staffordshire County Council in terms of New Growth Point funding following a letter received on 2 August 2007 from the Department of Communities and Local Government titled 'Housing Green Paper – Additional Growth Points & Eco-towns'.

2. Background

- 2.1 The 2004 household projection shows that there will be a need for significantly increased levels of housing across the West Midlands. Phase 2 of the partial review of the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy, whilst recognising the continuing need to channel new investments into Major Urban Areas, specifically recognises the role of Stafford as a “settlement of significant development”. Based on the recently published preferred option this would result in a Borough requirement for 10,300 (10,100 net) new dwellings in the period 2006-2026, of which 7,000 would be in the County Town of Stafford, and some 160 hectares of employment land. This requirement is some 25% in excess of the total demand for new housing, based on local need and past migration rates (8,240 households for the Plan period).
- 2.2 The West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy Spatial Options, published for consultation between January and March 2007 set out three options for housing growth across the West Midlands. In their response both Stafford Borough Council and Staffordshire County Council supported Option 3 which represented the highest level of growth. In making these representations both authorities recognise the considerable potential of Staffordshire, with Stafford as its County Town, to play a full role in improving the economic performance of the West Midlands and contribute positively to the national imperative to build more houses, following the best principles of sustainable development.

3. Our Vision for Stafford

- 3.1 Stafford Borough Council and Staffordshire County Council both recognize that given Stafford's geographic position and established economic base, the town has the potential to play a more significant role within the West Midlands region in terms of housing and employment growth. Both authorities have their administrative headquarters in Stafford and share a common vision of a town which is attractive and prosperous but which is not afraid to embrace change and where residents can fully access a wide range of quality local services including employment, retail, leisure, health and education. To this end both Councils can demonstrate a strong track record of effective and practical joint working around town centre regeneration, transportation and service delivery. Going forward both councils are

committed to delivering growth in ways which benefit the town and its residents, the region and the broader environment.

4. Community Plans and Strategies

4.1 Our Vision for Stafford is underpinned by the visions and objectives in the following key plans and strategies prepared for the Borough area:

- Improving Stafford Borough – Priorities for 2007-2013
A six-year Corporate Plan for the Borough Council (see Appendix 1)
- Stafford Borough Sustainable Community Plan 2006-2020 (see Appendix 2)
- Shaping the Future of Staffordshire 2005-2020 – The Sustainable Strategy for the County (see Appendix 3)

4.2 Throughout these plans and strategies the key priorities identified seek to promote economic and social regeneration through a relevant planning framework for economic growth, ensure that the town centres are attractive, vibrant and distinctive, create an increasingly attractive environment by promoting sustainable development and ensuring an adequate supply of housing including affordable housing for the Stafford Borough community.

5. Delivery and Implementation

5.1 As at March 2007 the County Town of Stafford had 1,610 new dwellings with planning commitments. For the purpose of the housing trajectory these committed sites have been discounted by over 35% and included in the first 5 year period from 2006-2011, totalling 1,100 dwellings, equivalent to an annual rate of 220. This figure should be considered in the context that an annual completion rate of 260 dwellings in Stafford Town has been achieved over the period 1996-2006.

5.2 Stafford Borough Council is currently preparing a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment which has initially identified the potential to provide up to 1,200 new dwellings over the period to 2026. For the purposes of the housing trajectory (see table below) it is considered that these sites will come forward consistently over the whole Plan period.

5.3 The development of 7,000 new houses in Stafford will require the release of Greenfield sites which will be in addition to the committed sites and potential locations identified through the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment.

5.4 Appendix 4 provides a map of the strategic choices and potential development locations around the County Town of Stafford which are

considered worthy of further investigation and discussion with key stakeholders in order to deliver the housing and employment provision.

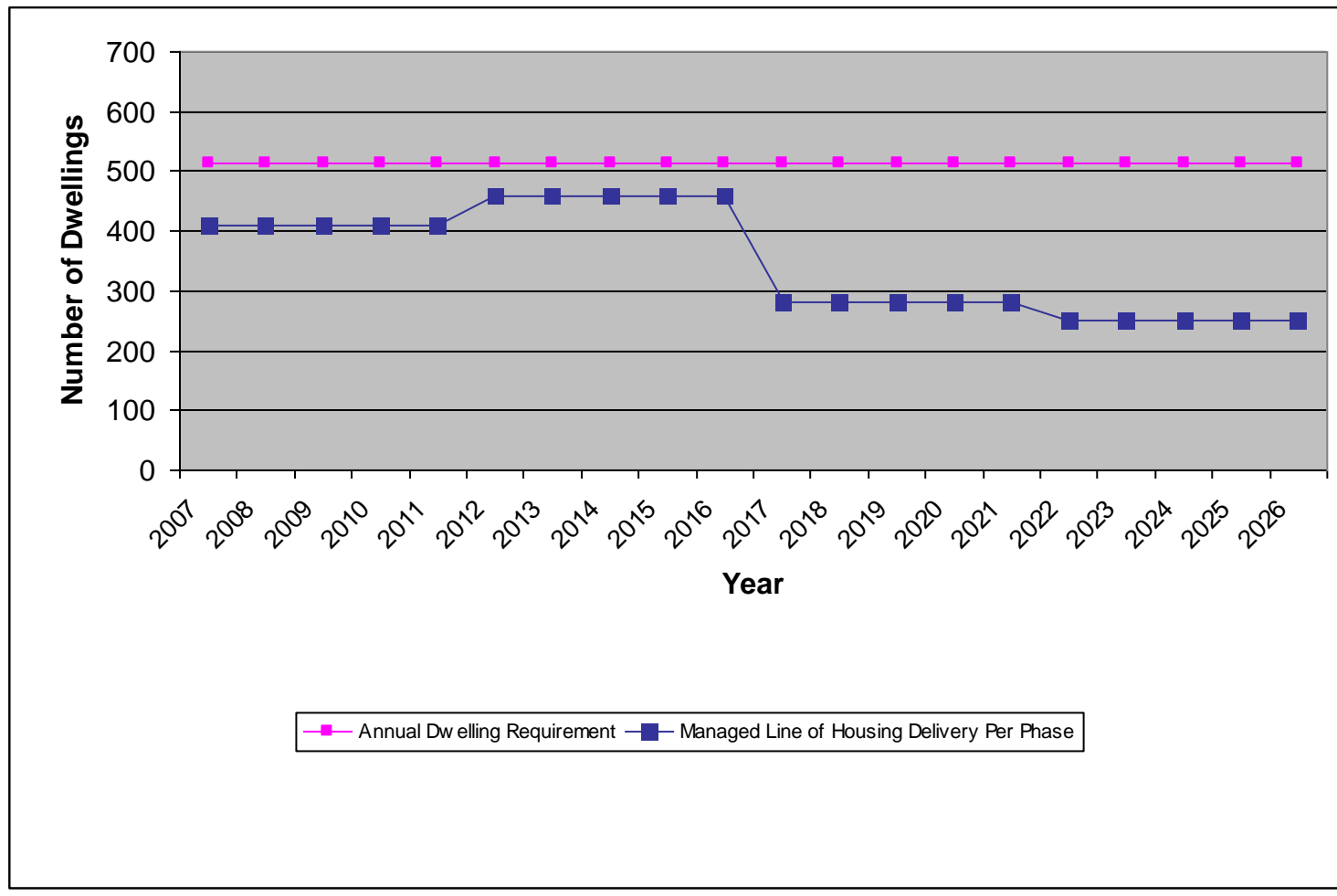
- 5.5 In September 2007 the Secretary of State saved the outstanding housing proposals not committed to date within the Stafford Borough Local Plan 2001. These sites have been included on the map of strategic housing options.

HOUSING TRAJECTORY FIGURES		
<i>PHASED PERIOD & YEARS</i>		<i>PROPOSED HOUSING DELIVERY</i>
PHASE 1	2006-2011	1,100 committed homes in Stafford + 650 strategic housing locations + 300 potential dwellings (SHLAA) = 2,050 total dwellings (410 per year)
PHASE 2	2011-2016	2,000 strategic housing locations + 300 potential dwellings (SHLAA) = 2,300 total dwellings (460 per year)
PHASE 3	2016-2021	1,100 strategic housing locations + 300 potential dwellings (SHLAA) = 1,400 total dwellings (280 per year)
PHASE 4	2021-2026	950 strategic housing locations + 300 potential dwellings (SHLAA) = 1,250 total dwellings (250 per year)
PLAN PERIOD	2006-2026	TOTAL = 7,000 dwellings

- 5.6 In particular it should be noted that one of the strategic housing locations south of Stafford is within the administrative boundary of South Staffordshire District. Such a possibility is recognised within the Regional Spatial Strategy Preferred Options Report through Policy CF3 – Level and distribution of new housing development.
- 5.7 Vital to the future delivery of housing and employment requirements is the implementation of transport infrastructure within and around the County Town of Stafford including proposed new roads, public transport provision, advanced traffic management solutions and other sustainable forms of movement by walking and cycling. Potential new road infrastructure has been shown on the map in Appendix 4.
- 5.8 It should be noted that the strategic housing options shown in Appendix 4 identify potential provision for 6,550 new dwellings which, when added to commitments of 1,100 dwellings and the potential number of

dwellings identified through the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment would give a total provision of 8,850. This figure is in excess of the 7,000 new dwellings required for Stafford by the Regional Spatial Strategy. However flexibility is needed as one or more of the sites may not be delivered due to infrastructure costs, land ownership difficulties etc... Any provision in excess of 7,000 new dwellings to Stafford would, in any event, give housing delivery options for longer term growth beyond 2026.

FIGURE 1 Housing Trajectory covering period 2006-2026 based upon RSS Revision for Preferred Options



6. The Case for Stafford Borough

- 6.1 The case for Stafford Borough's area being established as an Additional Growth Point is based on the New Growth Points criteria circulated with the letter, as set out below:

Proposals for New Growth Points are invited from areas where there is a good case for accelerated, additional economic and housing growth, and where this can be shown to relieve pressure on high demand areas and tackle affordability issues.

- 6.2 Stafford Borough is well located within the West Midlands region and nationally in terms of the transport network and this provides an excellent platform for additional economic and housing growth.
- 6.3 The County Town of Stafford is located between Birmingham and Manchester on the M6 motorway with two access junctions (13 & 14). Investment in the West Coast mainline will mean that by 2008 Stafford will be 1 hour & 20 minutes from London, 35 minutes from Birmingham and 1 hour from Manchester.
- 6.4 Within the West Midlands region Stafford Borough is well positioned to relieve market pressure in high demand areas. The West Midlands is not characterised by strongly defined local or sub-regional housing market areas and migration trends indicate relatively flexible labour mobility. Past trends of out-migration indicate housing and economic growth in the Borough could reduce the flight to growth areas in the region particularly Warwickshire and Worcestershire and more widely to London and the South-East regions. Stafford town is well positioned to assist a more local affordability problem across smaller settlements in the commuter belt to the north of Birmingham.
- 6.5 Rising house prices have meant that affordability has become a significant local issue. The housing affordability ratio in Stafford Borough is more acute than in six out of the nine adjacent local authority districts and development in Stafford town particularly could assist in relieving the higher demand areas of South Staffordshire and Lichfield districts. A Housing Needs Survey produced in 2002 and updated in 2004 identified a local need which could be as high as 500 affordable homes per year in Stafford Borough. Accelerated additional housing growth would help to relieve this pressure. The North Staffordshire Housing Market Assessment is currently being prepared which will provide more detailed information and context to the relationship between Stafford Borough and other administrative areas within North Staffordshire.
- 6.6 In February 2006, the Council's Housing stock was transferred to Stafford and Rural Homes, a Registered Social Landlord. At 1 April 2007, there were 1,688 families on the Stafford and Rural Homes Housing Register. More than 200 households in the Borough are

accepted as statutory homeless and in need of permanent housing each year. This is a trebling of numbers over an 8 year period. During 2007/08, nationally there were 0.8 homeless acceptances per 1,000 head of population, Stafford Borough has 1.8 acceptances per 1,000, well above the national average.

- 6.7 For Stafford Borough to deliver the necessary additional economic and housing growth required to reduce pressure on other areas of higher demand, address local affordability issues and to take advantage of its locational benefits, it will be important to maximise infrastructure investment through new development. Work to develop a sound evidential base is being undertaken in conjunction with Staffordshire County Council, other public agencies and the development industry. This includes a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (Level 1), a Transport Model for Stafford Town and the PPG17 Assessment of Open Space, Sport and Recreation. However further work will be required to establish the infrastructure investment required, in particular through a green infrastructure study, water resource / water cycle studies, transportation modelling and ecological surveys of specific strategic sites and river catchment / hydrological reports.
- 6.8 In terms of housing delivery Stafford Borough has a strong and consistent track record, with annual average rates of housing completions exceeding levels set out in the current Regional Spatial Strategy. Stafford Borough Council has therefore proved its commitment to build more houses in the area in line national planning and housing priorities.

Proposals and their rationale should be developed at least to the level needed for inclusion in the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) process and will be subject to the usual statutory planning processes. They therefore should be compatible with the underlying principles of the relevant current or proposed RSS in terms of growth strategy and capacity, but they should also commit to longer term sustainable growth.

- 6.9 The West Midlands Regional Assembly, as the Regional Planning Body, are currently preparing the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy – Phase Two Revision to take into account recent changes to national planning policy and the Sustainable Communities agenda. This process is due to be completed by 2009 and will provide regional policy for Local Development Frameworks at the local development plan level in terms of housing, employment, retailing, office, waste and transport matters.
- 6.10 In September 2007 Stafford Borough Council brought into effect the new work programme for preparing its Local Development Documents, including the Core Strategy, which will bring forward local planning policies and strategic sites in order to meet the District requirements.

- 6.11 Although the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy Phase Two Revision is not amending the current Regional Strategy there is provision for longer term sustainable growth by creating balanced and stable communities beyond the Major Urban Areas through increased housing and employment provision.
- 6.12 The County Town of Stafford has been identified as one of ten "Settlements of Significant Development", as set out in Policy CF2 (part) detailed below. These replace the five Growth Foci settlements included in the previous Regional Spatial Strategy.

"CF2 Housing beyond Major Urban Areas (Part of Policy included).

A. Beyond the Major Urban Areas, strategic housing development should be concentrated in and adjacent to towns which are capable of balanced and sustainable growth. These are the "Settlements of Significant Development", namely Worcester, Telford, Shrewsbury, Hereford, Rugby, Burton-upon-Trent, Stafford, Nuneaton, Warwick / Leamington Spa and Redditch. These Settlements of Significant Development:

- i) act as sub-regional service centres;**
- ii) have the capacity to accommodate additional development without significant harm to local communities and in sustainable locations;**
- iii) are able to balance housing and employment opportunities and provide social infrastructure and services to meet the needs of expanded settlements;**
- iv) are able to deliver local regeneration priorities through new development; and**
- v) either already have or are capable of developing good accessibility by public transport and through increased provision for walking and cycling.**

These Settlements of Significant Development are shown on the Communities for the Future diagram."

- 6.13 Stafford Borough currently performs very well in terms of achieving longer term sustainable growth, with the West Midlands Regional Observatory Lifestyle Survey published in 2005 identifying that 73% of the Borough's economically active population live and work within its boundary. It is anticipated that the population of Stafford Borough will increase by over 9,500 people to the year 2026, an increase of almost 8%. (Source: Regional Spatial Strategy Review Policy Options Briefing Note – Paper 1 'Analysis of the Population Implications of the RSS partial review of housing provision within Staffordshire'). As part of Stafford's vision for the future it is vital to maintain and enhance this

degree of self containment such that the majority of local people can access local jobs and services. This will mean that housing growth is complemented by local employment, retail and leisure growth together with new transport and social infrastructure.

- 6.14 The County Town of Stafford is seen as being on the fringe of the commuter belt to the West Midlands Conurbation. In the 2001 Census the net out-flow of residents to employment in the West Midlands from Stafford Town was 1281 (gross figures 1970 outward, 689 inward), this may be seen to be limited when compared to the 17837 people who both live and work in the town. Overall, Stafford Town is a net importer of labour (1824 people) with a total number of people employed in the town of 31002 (2001 Census Special Workplace Statistics).

Proposals will need to offer at least 20% housing growth above the pre-Sustainable Communities Plan baseline (i.e. the level in relevant RPG guidance - or equivalent - at January 2003), with overall housing growth of at least 500 homes per year.

- 6.15 Stafford Borough meets both the criteria set out above in terms of housing growth with the annualised dwelling provision set out in the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy Preferred Option being 80% over the January 2003 baseline and an annual average housing completion rate of more than 500 dwellings. The area is one of the few locations in the West Midlands outside of the Major Urban Areas required to achieve such high rates of housing development.
- 6.16 The 80% increase in the percentage of housing provision proposed in the revised RSS Preferred Option is more than twice that of the 32% increase of the initial 29 New Growth points (referred to in the Housing Green Paper Chapter 1, Page 24, Footnote 17).
- 6.17 In June 2004 Regional Planning Guidance for the West Midlands (RPG11) was adopted – this has now been revised to be the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS), following commencement of Part 1 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.
- 6.18 Based on the annual average rates of housing provision established through the existing RSS and the apportionment methodology using the Ministerial letter dated June 2004 the total figure from 2001-2021 for the Stafford Borough area is 5,602 dwellings. This equates to an annual average completion rate of 280 dwellings.
- 6.19 In November 2005 the Regional Planning Body launched the partial review for the Regional Spatial Strategy, with a project plan published in March 2006. As part of this review process the Regional Planning Body is addressing the level of housing provision for the Region from 2001 to 2026. In January 2007 the Regional Planning Body published the document 'West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy – Phase Two Revision Spatial Options' which identified two housing options for

Stafford Borough, Option 1 being 9,500 new dwellings whilst Option 2 and 3 required a total of 12,900 new dwellings for the period 2001-2026. This equated to annual average rates of housing provision of 380 dwellings under Option 1 and 516 dwellings for Options 2 and 3 respectively. Staffordshire County Council and Stafford Borough Council supported the level of housing provision for the Borough set out under Options 2 and 3.

- 6.20 In September 2007 the Regional Planning Partnership of the West Midlands Regional Assembly agreed a figure of 10,300 for Stafford Borough covering the period 2006 – 2026, which provides an annual average requirement of 515 dwellings. The revised figure in the Preferred Option document takes into account the latest 2004-based Household Projections as well as the new base date and timescales.

Proposals should be primarily focused on urban areas, although under certain circumstances rural areas bordering an urban area could link in with a proposal from that area.

- 6.21 Approximately 70% of new housing provision set out in the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy will be in the County Town of Stafford, which would experience more than a 25% growth above the existing housing stock. The potential for the area to be a Growth Point is clearly set out in the Regional Spatial Strategy Phase Two Revision through Policy CF2, set out above. However, in order to meet the full Regional Spatial Strategy requirements housing development will take place in other parts of the Borough area, principally in larger settlements such as the market towns of Stone and Eccleshall. Whilst these settlements have a range of services, they are economically and functionally linked to Stafford.
- 6.22 Stafford is well placed to act as a strategic growth centre. It is identified as a strategic centre, a local regeneration centre outside of Regeneration Zones and an Other Large Settlement by the existing West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy.
- 6.23 The County Town of Stafford is the main population centre of the Borough with the urban population exceeding 60,000 people. It is the major comparison goods retail centre in the Borough and the only centre with warehouse/retail parks.
- 6.24 Stafford town centre is the principal cultural centre of the Borough, offering facilities including a theatre, cinema and art gallery. The town is the major employment centre of the Borough with a range of 'stand alone' employers and a number of industrial estates / business parks.
- 6.25 The Stafford Campus of Staffordshire University is located on the edge of the town. The Stafford College of Further Education is located in the Town Centre. Six of the seven State Secondary Schools in the Borough are situated at Stafford.

- 6.26 Stafford is the principal location for sporting, leisure and indoor recreational uses in the Borough. Tourism and hotel facilities are focussed, but are not exclusively located, at Stafford. Stafford is the principal administrative centre for the County and Borough Councils, acting as a sub-regional centre of governance for a number of County-wide services including Police and Ambulance services, the local Health Authority, and a range of Government bodies and other agencies. The major health care facility, Stafford District General Hospital, is located in the town.
- 6.27 Stafford is the main hub for public transport in the Borough and has a range of services serving the town, its surrounding area and a variety of other destinations including Lichfield, Cannock, Wolverhampton, Newport, Uttoxeter, Stone and the Potteries. Stafford is a principal rail station on the West Coast Main Line with services to the South-west via Birmingham, to London, the North-west and Scotland. Two M6 motorway junctions are located adjacent to the town which enjoys good accessibility to the North West and the rest of the West Midlands region via the M6 and M6 Toll. There is also good accessibility to the East Midlands via the improved A50 link and the Welsh borders via the M54.

Proposals will need to demonstrate that the schemes in this bidding round and the longer term plans for sustainable growth could be achieved without major negative environmental, social and economic impacts. They should have a good rationale in terms of the wider objectives for sustainable growth.

- 6.28 Stafford Borough Council is delivering a comprehensive and on-going Sustainability Appraisal process for the Local Development Framework together with all proposals and spatial options being considered against 20 sustainability objectives, which align with those used to guide the Stafford Borough Community Plan 2006-2020.
- 6.29 A significant level of evidence gathering work is currently taking place including discussions with key stakeholders across the environmental, social and economic sectors in order to establish the level of impact and deliver strategic solutions to overcome particular issues around sustainable growth. In particular close work is being carried out with the Stafford Chamber of Commerce and the Stafford Borough Local Delivery Board through the Local Area Agreement to engage implementation bodies to deliver growth.
- 6.30 Initial evidence gathering work has been carried out but further significant surveys are required to prove deliverability of the level of proposed growth for the area. However an initial appraisal informed the decision to support growth identified in the Regional Spatial Strategy Phase Two Revision – Spatial Options (January 2007) through housing and employment land being available which would not lead to significant negative environmental, social and economic impacts.

- 6.31 The focus for new sustainable growth will be at the County Town of Stafford in order to fully utilise existing provision of services and facilities, as set out in the maps attached to this expression of interest. As a result of industrial restructuring and other changes Stafford still has a supply of brownfield sites. The Council has recently completed a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment which demonstrates that there is a significant potential for sustainable sites to come forward, many of which are close to the town centre and major public transport infrastructure. However the scale of growth is such that Greenfield sites will also be required. Where such opportunities have been identified these are well located, sustainable urban extensions which take advantage of the extensive range of transport, social and community infrastructure within Stafford. Currently some of this infrastructure is under-utilised, e.g. the capacity in some local schools.
- 6.32 Significant housing growth within Stafford would also complement the Borough Council's vision to revitalise Stafford Town Centre. Although Stafford Town Centre has a reasonable range of retail and leisure facilities it is widely acknowledged that it under-achieves in terms of its catchment and as a County Town. Indeed, information contained within the Regional Centre Study demonstrates that between 1998 and 2003 it was by far the worst performing Town Centre within the West Midlands in terms of loss of town centre jobs (see Appendix 5).
- 6.33 Following a Town Centre Vision exercise and further master planning the Borough Council now have firm proposals to extend Stafford's retail and leisure offer. A new leisure centre adjacent to the Town Centre is due for completion in March 2008. This will facilitate a major new retail and leisure scheme comprising some 240,000 sq ft of retail and an 8 screen cinema together with car parking and residential apartments. The Borough Council is working closely with Staffordshire County Council to bring forth proposals for their land at Tipping Street for a mixed use scheme comprising retail and offices. The Council is also working jointly with Staffordshire County Council on proposals for further car parking and a mixed use development at Kingsmead. Overall a 30% increase in retail floorspace is anticipated. Further housing development will add to the vitality and the viability of Stafford Town Centre and in turn the new facilities will enable residents to access most of their retail and leisure requirements locally
- 6.34 The Regional Spatial Strategy Phase Two Revision – Preferred Option sets out that Stafford Borough should have a five year reservoir of readily available employment land amounting to 40 hectares available at any given time, with a longer term indicative level of provision of 160 hectares for the period 2006-2026. Some of this will be found through brownfield sites within the existing urban area. Elsewhere there is scope to expand existing employment sites. Stafford is therefore well placed to deliver sustainable growth, maintaining its high degree of self containment.

Proposals will need to set out their local and strategic impacts on the environment (for example regarding water supply, flooding and sewerage) and they should be realistic about the need for additional investment.

- 6.35 A key element of the future development strategy is to deliver green infrastructure alongside new housing and employment provision to maintain ecological, habitat and landscape features. A number of green links and corridors existing between the current urban areas of Stafford and the surrounding countryside which will be protected and enhanced as new development comes forward. To achieve delivery of green infrastructure it is proposed to produce a comprehensive study for the County Town of Stafford with recommendations based on viability and future implementation programmes for green infrastructure. This would include a range of measure from informal open space to a proposed new country park. This work would develop the PPG17 Assessments currently being prepared by consultants in order to provide recreation, leisure and open space strategies for the future.
- 6.36 Stafford Borough Council has had detailed discussions with the Strategic Environmental Agencies in terms of significant proposals coming forward through the Local Development Framework and particular locations, as set out on the maps attached in Appendix 1. Furthermore Natural England would support the Council in the delivery of more detailed ecological assessments being carried out for these locations as part of the proposals in order to provide a more realistic basis for bringing forward new developments following a successful bid for Growth Point funding.
- 6.37 The Borough Council is carrying out five separate Appropriate Assessment reports for the respective Special Areas of Conservation and RAMSAR sites within the area in accordance with the EU Directive 92/43/EC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Fauna and Flora, known more commonly as the Habitats Directive.
- 6.38 The principal water resource provider, including water supply and sewage capacity, in the Stafford Borough area is Severn Trent Water. Discussions have taken place in order to establish the implications of increased housing provision over the Plan period to 2026 as well as the main focus for such development being at the County Town of Stafford. For example in Stafford the existing sewage infrastructure would need to be upgraded. Delivery of new development will therefore need to take account of existing sewage infrastructure constraints through a feasibility study with recommendations regarding future investment priorities for Severn Trent Water.
- 6.39 Severn Trent Water is currently preparing a draft Water Resources Plan for submission to the Environment Agency in March 2008. Once the Water Resources Plan has been agreed by the Environment Agency it will inform Severn Trent Water's Final Business Plan to be

submitted to Ofwat in 2009. Additional infrastructure required to provide water resources to the Stafford Borough area will be managed through the corporate Business Plan, although this would have to be informed by a specific feasibility study in association with Severn Trent Water.

- 6.40 The Borough Council in conjunction with three other councils in Staffordshire has commissioned the consultancy Halcrow to carry out a combined Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment for the area in order to guide the strategic location of significant new development. This project has involved representatives from the Environment Agency in order to make sure that all appropriate implications are taken into account. Although the County Town of Stafford is subject to flooding there are key strategic locations for delivering housing development outside of flood risk areas. However further feasibility studies will be required to secure future delivery of housing and employment provision, facilitated by Level 2 Strategic Flood Risk Assessments.
- 6.41 Furthermore the new development proposals for the County Town of Stafford should also be informed by a Water Cycle Study to consider the implications of climate change, future water resources and link to the current work being carried out for the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment.

Proposals will need to set out their impact on the transport networks in the area, both strategic and local, and they should be realistic about the need for additional investment, particularly in the context of the transport resources likely to be available in the context of regional funding allocations. (Please note that any bids for transport related projects from District Councils would need to be supported by the relevant County Council).

- 6.42 Both Councils are committed to maintaining and enhancing Stafford's current status as one of the most self-contained and sustainable settlements within the West Midlands, whereby the majority of local services, including employment can be accessed locally. Moreover, as a result of its strategic location on the rail network, Stafford is in a strong position to effect significant modal shift, with improvement to local rail services planned for December 2008. The strategic context for these improvements was provided by the MID-MAN Multi Modal study which suggested significant improvements to rail services between Birmingham and Manchester (via Stafford) and along the West Coast Mainline between Crewe, Stoke-on-Trent and London (via Stone and Stafford) as a means of deflecting traffic away from the M6. Beyond 2008 the Department for Transport and the rail industry are considering a major intervention to improve capacity through Stafford station. Two possible solutions have been identified: a grade separation of the junction at Stafford station, or a new "Stafford bypass" line between Norton Bridge and Colwich Junction. Either solution would help to improve performance, and provide additional paths for services passing through the Stafford area.

- 6.43 The completion of the Trent Valley Twin Tracking Programme between Tamworth and Armitage on the West Coast Mainline in 2008 will facilitate changes to timetables which will see the introduction of more frequent and faster services along these routes. Both Councils are currently working with Network Rail and Virgin West Coast to significantly increase car parking at Stafford Station (350 additional spaces) by December 2008 to coincide with the introduction of the new timetable. It is our firm belief that this investment will affect travel patterns such that some of the transportation impacts of new development will be mitigated.
- 6.44 Notwithstanding the above a vital factor to future housing delivery is improvements to the local transport infrastructure. For a number of years a network approach has been followed through developer contributions secured by the Stafford Urban Area Traffic Management Strategy (SUATMS). The study underpinning SUATMS forecasts that traffic from new developments and background traffic growth will result in a number of key routes and junctions operating above capacity by 2011. To remediate these problems and promote a more sustainable travel patterns, SUATMS recommends £4.8 m of capital expenditure between 2001 and 2011 for transport improvements. These initiatives will address congestion, accessibility, road safety and regeneration issues and improve town centre conditions for all travellers. Full implementation is likely to result in a 3% shift from car to sustainable travel modes at peak times, sufficient to effect a significant reduction in levels of congestion and travel times. Contributions towards transport improvements are being shared equitably between public resources and private companies wishing to develop in the town. The strategy is under continual revision and is flexible enough to be adapted to support a stepped change in housing and employment going forward.
- 6.45 However significant housing proposals will require radical transport solutions. Work is currently taking place with Staffordshire County Council on this matter and in June 2007 Atkins Transport Planning were appointed by Staffordshire County Council (SCC) and Stafford Borough Council as part of the 2003 Call On Commission to carry out a preliminary study to help understand the transport impact of proposed development in Stafford.
- 6.46 The key points of the commission are to: (1) Develop a new transport model to justify the most sustainable locations, in transport terms, for new housing and employment development in Stafford; and (2) Establish the scale of any new highway and public transport schemes necessary to deliver the new development.
- 6.47 This model will be developed so that it simulates existing traffic patterns and travelling conditions by motor vehicles including buses within the town. Once the base model has been calibrated and validated it will then be used to model the impact of potential strategic housing and employment allocations and to develop a sustainable

transport strategy to deliver development in the most appropriate locations. Consultants will cost the recommended initiatives and apportion costs between respective developments based upon their relative transport impacts. Committed transport schemes and developments will be taken into account in this process. It is anticipated that this study will be completed by September 2008.

- 6.48 On-going discussions are taking place with the Highways Agency in terms of future strategic locations for housing development as well as the Agency sitting on the steering group for the Stafford transportation model to include the implications of the forthcoming M6 improvements. The Agency has also been involved in the development of this Expression of Interest.

Proposals should make a good contribution to the wider sustainability objectives set out in Homes for All and the Sustainable Communities Plan, for example in encouraging high quality design and environmental enhancement.

- 6.49 Stafford Borough Council has a strong commitment to urban design and sustainable development principles. Stafford Borough was the first authority in Staffordshire to employ dedicated urban design officers. Recently, following a competitive process, the consultancy Benoy has been engaged as specialist advisors on major schemes. The Borough Council has also actively involved the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) on major schemes.

- 6.50 In February 2006 Richard Simmons, the Chief Executive of CABE visited Stafford to lead a seminar for Members and in April 2007 CABE Commissioners spent a day in Stafford looking at plans for the town centre. This constructive engagement with CABE continues. Recent levels of success can be evidenced by Stafford Borough winning four out of the six categories at the 2007 Southern Staffordshire Conservation and Design Awards.

- 6.51 Furthermore the recent Audit Commission Environment Inspection for Stafford Borough concluded that the environment service was “good with promising prospects for improvement”. The Inspector stated the following “The Council has a good awareness of sustainability issues and plays a leading role on environmental and sustainable development issues. It takes a strong role in working with partners and the community to raise awareness of climate change.”

- 6.52 The Stafford Borough Local Strategic Partnership published the Community Plan 2006-2020 in September 2006 following detailed consultation and engagement with the local community and key stakeholders. Subsequently the Local Delivery Board has been established through the Local Area Agreement programme.

6.53 The new Local Development Framework and its associated planning policy documents will provide the spatial expression to the vision and objectives in the Community Plan 2006-2020 and the Local Area Agreement objectives through targeted policies and strategic allocations. Details of the Community Plan and Local Area Agreement are provided in Appendix 1 to this document.

Proposals should demonstrate potential to contribute positively to cross-Government priorities, for example on regional economic performance and on innovation and efficiency on urban transport.

6.54 As the County Town Stafford has always been a centre of administration and this is reflected in the number of public sector jobs. However it has also been a significant manufacturing town with a focus on railway engineering, power engineering and shoes. There have also been a significant number of defence jobs associated with RAF Stafford.

6.55 In the past few years there has been a considerable erosion of this manufacturing base, typified in particular by the closure of Lotus Shoes and the run down of the former GEC / Alstom operation. This coincided with the closure of the Defence Logistics Operation at RAF Stafford. Whilst these closures attracted some attention the overall performance of Stafford's economy has never received significant recognition either in the Regional Economic Strategy, the Regional Spatial Strategy or in Advantage West Midlands Investment Strategy.

6.56 As evidence, Appendix 5 contains Figure 3.3 from Page 24 of the Regional Centres Study which demonstrates quite graphically that by some measures Stafford Borough was the worst performing West Midlands District in relation to employment change in the period 1998-2003. A similar pattern emerges in relation to employment change in Town and City Centres (Table 3.3 Page 27) where again Stafford was the worst performing Authority.

6.57 Against this background there has been a considerable fight back, led by the Borough and County Council. More recent indications appear to demonstrate that the County Town of Stafford has been very successful in adapting and attracting new employment growth. This has occurred in part because the right sites were offered to incoming investment, Primepoint at Junction 14 and the Staffordshire County Council promoted Technology Park adjacent to the University in particular. This recent success was evidenced in 2006 by the Borough Council being awarded the 12th highest LABGI grant for new business growth amongst English District followed by the 2nd highest award in 2007. However Stafford's economy remains fragile and there needs to be a continuing supply of good quality employment land as part of an integrated growth strategy if recent success is not to be reversed.

Where possible, proposals should demonstrate synergy with other public sector programmes and should also seek to lever in private sector contributions.

- 6.58 The recently established Local Delivery Board, through the Local Area Agreement arrangements, brings together key public and private sector implementation bodies to secure future initiatives and programmes.
- 6.59 Both Councils have a track record of working with the private sector, leveraging in tens of £million of private sector investment to Stafford as well as transport network contributions. As an example significant private sector employment has been secured through Pro-Logis on the Primepoint development at Junction 14 of the M6 motorway. At the Technology Park adjacent to Staffordshire University the County Council has facilitated a development with private sector investors which has delivered in excess of 50,000 square metres of quality floorspace and attracted many new firms to Stafford. Significant progress has been achieved by engaging with the private sector applicants, infrastructure providers, land owners and developers including Lord Stafford, concerning the Burleyfields area, a proposed major urban expansion close to Stafford town centre. At the Areva site, St Leonard's, Stafford the Borough Council, Advantage West Midlands and other public agencies are working together to secure the long term future of the French company to maintain a presence in Stafford through a mixed-use re-development. Following the disposal by Advantage West Midlands of the St George's site Stafford Borough Council has worked closely with the developer and other public agencies to deliver a highly sustainable mixed use development close to Stafford town centre including housing, offices and a retirement village.
- 6.60 The future of the former RAF Stafford (now MOD Stafford) remains a concern to both Councils. Following the closure announcement a multi agency task force including Advantage West Midlands was set up. An early success has been the arrival of 22 Signals Regiment, who have been warmly welcomed into the Town. For the future our ambition is to make Stafford the location of the Midlands' first "Super Garrison". A significant increase of Army presence in the Town would reinforce our vision for Stafford as a significant area for new growth. Given the location of MOD Stafford within the Town it would also complement the Army's ambition for their personnel to be more integrated into local communities.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 Stafford is in a strong position to deliver long term sustainable growth and in particular to deliver housing numbers in excess of local demand. Stafford's role as a strategic centre is recognised in the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy and it is considered that all relevant criteria are met to enable its recognition as a new Growth Point.

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