

# Stafford Borough is changing... help us shape it.

New Local Plan 2025 - 2045

Communication and Engagement  
Strategy Consultation - 2026



## **Stafford Borough New Local Plan 2025 – 2045 Communication and Engagement Strategy**

### **Introduction**

The Communication and Engagement Strategy (CES) sets out how the Council will involve the community and other stakeholders in the main planning functions of preparing a local plan (or other planning policy document). Consultation and engagement concerning planning applications and the decision-making process is covered by other processes. For plan-making this document sets out:

- What will be consulted upon;
- Who we will consult;
- When the Council will consult; and
- How the Council will consult (methods used to consult).

The CES will also provide information about:

- The role of elected councillors, parish and town councils, and voluntary and community groups in planning matters;
- Who you can contact for assistance in local planning matters, and
- What will be expected of you when you make comments and how those comments will be presented.

### **Legal Requirements**

There is a clear emphasis throughout national policy on encouraging early and consistent community involvement. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the online Planning Practice Guidance encourages front-loading engagement and co-operation with the community so that local plans reflect a collective vision and agreed set of priorities. They also highlight the importance of early community engagement before planning and other applications are submitted.

Specifically for plan making, the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026 sets out the steps to produce local plans and supplementary planning documents. It sets out who is to be included at each consultation and which documents are available at each stage of the process.

## **Vision and Our Commitment to You**

### **Our Vision**

The Borough Council believes that local community participation and involvement is central to the delivery of sustainable development and helps to provide effective planning for the future.

Our vision is “to provide a platform for people to express their views on planning matters and share their local knowledge in an interactive and inclusive manner, to help inform plan making decisions and create effective strategies.”

To achieve our vision we will,

- create and prepare planning policy documents in a user-friendly manner
- ensure our methods and approach are transparent and accessible to help people understand the plan making process better
- record and consider views to help inform Planning Policy Documents
- seek to work with groups and individuals who do not normally engage with plan making
- encourage developers to engage with local communities on their proposals as soon as practicable.

## **The Planning System**

The Planning System plays a key role in shaping the use of land and development to provide attractive, vibrant and well-designed places to live and work. Whilst it seeks to conserve and protect the environment, it also aims to provide new development that meets the needs for new housing, employment, and other facilities. This inevitably involves making some challenging decisions. The role of the Local Planning Authority is to make balanced decisions after considering consultation responses and other material planning matters.

### **Plan Making**

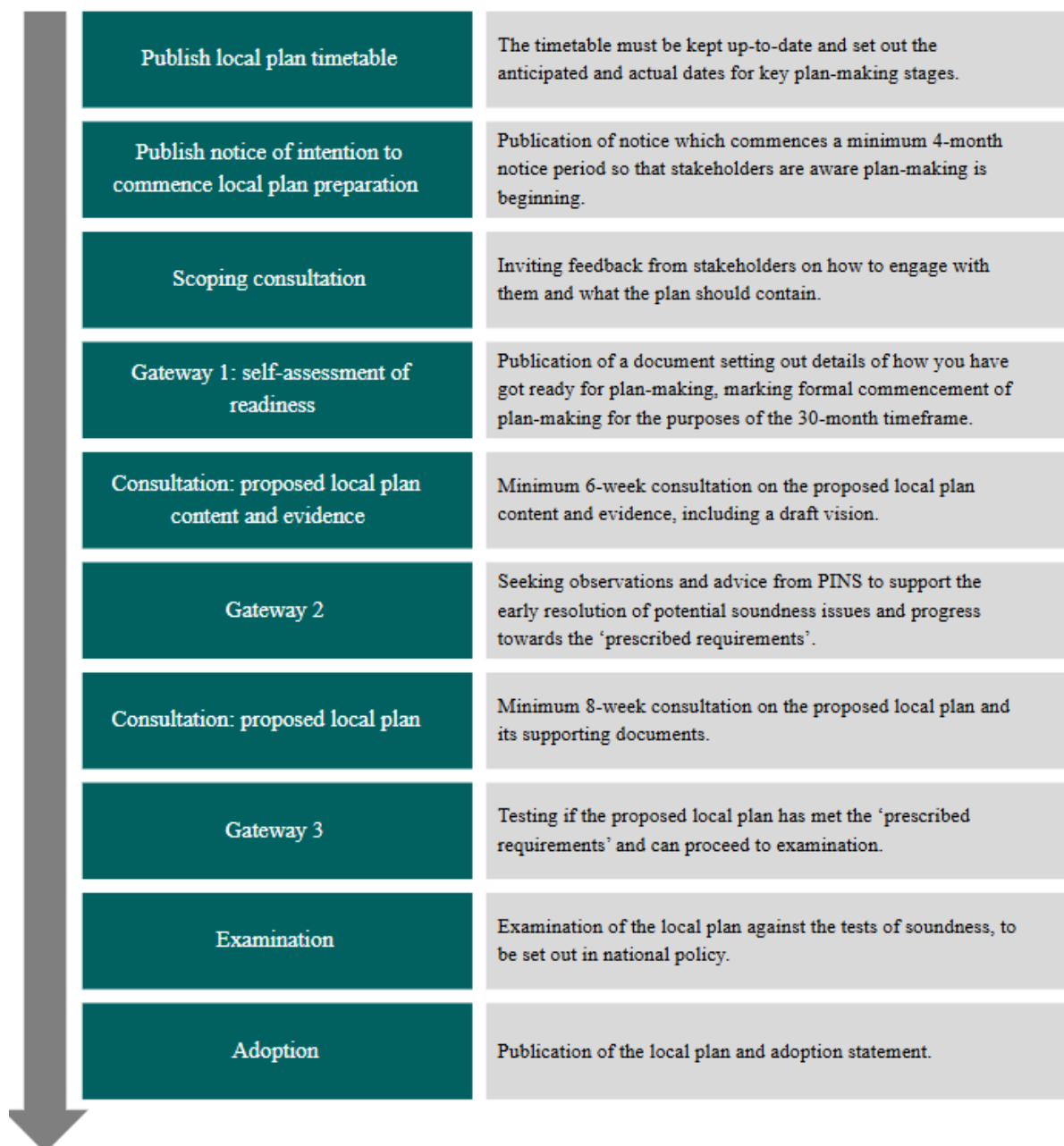
Plan Making is referred to as planning policy or spatial planning. Plan Making requires Local Planning Authorities to produce a Local Plan for the area which sets out how the area will develop over a period of time. The Local Plan policies will be used to guide future development and provide the framework for decisions on planning applications.

The process of creating a Local Plan requires Local Planning Authorities to identify and engage, at an early stage, with all those that may be interested in the development or content of the Local Plan, and with groups who may be affected by proposals. With the help of the local community and the collation of an evidence base, the Local Planning Authority will identify options for addressing local development needs, to inform a preferred approach for future development. This requires carrying out a robust community consultation with local communities, businesses and other interested parties.

## The Local Plan

The Local Plan is prepared through a process of engagement and community involvement, with a timetable setting out details of all the Local Plan documents (including supporting documents) and those that we are or will be progressing. The preparation of each of these documents will provide important opportunities for communities to get involved in shaping the places in which they live.

The process of producing the Local Plan and associated documents involves several stages as set out in the image below:



## **Access to background local plan documents and evidence base**

The documents prepared as part of the Local Plan are prepared on the basis of a sound and up-to-date evidence base. All relevant evidence base studies, assessments or strategies will be made available on the Council website. Paper copies of these documents can be made available upon request subject to the relevant fees and charges.

The adopted Local Plan is made up of the Plan for Stafford Borough 2011-2031 and Part 2 which is now being replaced with work started on a New Local Plan (2025-2045) including evidence based studies, establishing a Brownfield Land Register and initial consultation exercises. Future work on all of these aspects will need to meet the requirements set out in this document, when finalised following this consultation.

## **Strategic Environmental Assessment**

Local Plan documents are subject to the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) process. The SEA assess the preparation of the Local Plan's policies and proposals as these are development against social, environmental and economic objectives to ensure the best approach is delivered. A key element of the SEA process is the baseline information established through survey data. A series of SEA reports produced through the preparation of the Local Plan are consulted upon alongside the policies and proposals.

## **Supplementary Plans**

Supplementary Plans are complementary documents that provide further details and guidance to policies contained in the Local Plan, and are used as material considerations in reaching planning decisions.

Supplementary Plans take many forms, ranging from a master plan or development brief, to design guides and general additional guidance produced by the Council.

## **Engage in the Local Plan**

This section explains how and when you can be involved in influencing and informing the production of the development plan and other planning policy documents for the Stafford Borough. Legislation sets out which documents need to be in place, the processes to produce those documents and the minimum requirements for involvement in their production.

## **How we involve you in the Local Plan**

Advertising and notification of forthcoming opportunities to be involved is essential. To improve efficiency, the council will make use of electronic communication tools and build upon existing communication channels wherever possible. The council will engage, involve and consult on planning matters in line with the latest regulations and guidance as appropriate and relevant.

An assessment under the equalities regulations may be appropriate and a requirement for some planning policy documents. Equality Impact Assessments (EQIA) may be undertaken as a tool for ensuring that equality, social inclusion and community cohesion issues are considered when drawing up policies.

The Town and Country Planning (Local planning) (England) Regulations 2012 define the 'specific consultation bodies' we must consult with (list below). The Regulations define 'general consultation bodies' as voluntary bodies some or all of whose activities benefit any part of the authority's area and other bodies who represent, in the authority's area, the interests of different racial, ethnic or national groups; different religious groups; disabled persons; and, business interests.

## **Your involvement in the Local Plan**

To ensure that your involvement is effective you will be expected to:

- Make your representation/comments within the specified time period;
- Provide comments in a clear and succinct format, ensuring that representations relate to the issues and documents being consulted upon;
- Be aware that your comments with your name attached (for local plan and planning policy consultations) will be made publicly available with personal and sensitive information redacted in line with the Council's privacy notices;
- Be understanding and respectful of alternative views. We have a zero tolerance of abusive language etc. All comments are moderated and any that are considered to fall short of these requirements will be rejected; and
- If you are replying on behalf of a group or organisation, consider and explain how members of the group have been involved in formulating the representation.

## **Role of elected councilors**

The role of locally elected councilors in representing the views and concerns of residents in the planning process is very important. However, your views can only be formally considered when you make them in writing (traditional or email) to the Council within the specified time for a particular consultation.

## **Parish Councils**

Parish and town councils play a vital role in community involvement in the planning system and the production of neighbourhood plans. Parish and town councillors can comment on the preparation of policy documents that may affect their area as well as the Borough. Parish and town councils have an important role when identifying priorities in their areas and provide a valuable means of sharing information about the planning process to their local community. This is particularly important for when parish and town councils produce a neighbourhood plan.

## **Role of voluntary and community groups**

We believe that everyone should have the opportunity to be actively involved in decisions that affect them and their community. Voluntary and community groups are encouraged to be involved in planning matters and can represent their members. Please see the following sections for how to register to be involved in planning policy documents.

## **Less well-represented groups**

We are aware that some people and groups are less well-represented or thought to be 'hard to reach'. We also understand that particular groups may have specific areas of interest or a limited capacity for involvement. Every opportunity will be taken to add to our awareness of such groups; to increase engagement and to identify issues and policies that are likely to be of particular concern and we welcome proactive suggestions to increase such engagement. Documents and information will be made available in alternative formats upon request.

**Please note:** News updates can only be sent to those that sign up to and remain on the Local Plan consultation list.

## **The Local Plan Process**

The preparation of the Local Plan represents the most resource intensive strand of Local Plan preparation, particularly in relation to community involvement.

To prepare the policies and proposals for the Development Plan, the Borough Council will consult with the community and statutory organisations listed in Appendix 1 and 2, and establish the main issues for the document to address as part of developing policy options and key matters.

## **Scoping, Early Participation and Evidence Gathering**

This stage of the Local Plan is intended to be wide ranging and informal. It will invite discussion on the objectives of the relevant plan making document and the options available for achieving those objectives. The Council will not put forward any specific proposals at this stage.

The council will also at this stage be collecting information on a range of socio-economic. Furthermore, survey information will be sought on key elements of the Local Plan, including a Call for Sites exercise alongside key housing and employment statistics. Additionally, each year the Brownfield Land Register will be reviewed to identify new development sites, which will include potential sites through the Permission In Principle approach.

The local community and stakeholders are encouraged to provide their details via a consultation database so that they can be kept informed throughout the following stages.

Representations at this stage should be on the questions raised. You will be able to comment online, email or via letter.

If you are requesting the allocation of a specific site for development, then it is highly desirable that you engage with the Council at this early stage so that community involvement is maximised and appraisal work can be undertaken on the proposed site through the plan preparation process. Development proposals can be more robustly assessed if the site and its proposed use are clearly defined. You can submit your land via the **Call for Sites** webpage.

## **Vision and Strategy**

The Council will use the responses and information gathered during the Scoping the Issues and Early Participation stage to develop:

- Draft vision and proposed aims and objectives
- Proposed spatial strategy
- Initial draft policies
- Summary of evidence gathered and evidence still to gather

This stage will set out the Council's preferred approach to delivering the objectives identified as part of Scoping the Issues and Early Participation stage through the Proposed Local Plan content and evidence.

The community and stakeholders, including statutory organisations, will be encouraged to participate in the on-going policy development process and a range of consultation / engagement methods will be used to help achieve this. Following on from the early engagement on key matters, the Council will consult on the Proposed Local Plan content and evidence for a minimum period of 6 weeks.

This stage provides an opportunity for representations which suggest alternative options for delivery of the Local Plan objectives. You will be able to comment on this stage either online or via email or by letter.

If you are requesting the allocation of a site for development you will be expected to clearly define the site, the uses proposed for the site, describe any community involvement already undertaken and why you think that the proposed site is a more sustainable option than those put forward by the Council.

### **Publication and submission**

Following preparation of the Proposed Local Plan the Borough Council will publish a final version and invite comments on the document from the community, statutory organisations and other interested parties as part of an 8 week consultation stage.

This is effectively the final stage to submit formal representations to the Borough Council on the Proposed Local Plan. The Borough Council will then submit the Proposed Local Plan, the Sustainability Appraisal and the entire evidence base, including the representations made, to the Secretary of State for an Examination in Public.

### **Examination**

An independent Inspector is appointed to undertake an Examination in Public (EiP), to test the legal compliance and soundness of the Proposed Local Plan whilst considering all representations made at the Publication stage.

Prior to the EiP, the Borough Council must publish an advert notifying the public, including any interested parties, about details of the Examination.

Anybody who submitted representations at the Publication stage will have the opportunity to present their case to the Inspector.

The Planning Inspector will decide on how to best proceed with the EiP, identifying issues which should be debated. Generally the EiP includes a series of formal hearing which are chaired by the Planning Inspector.

A Programme Officer will be appointed from outside of the Planning Department and will be responsible for managing all the arrangements of the Examination process, including collating all documents, where appropriate, organising site visits and dealing with all correspondence. The Programme Officer reports to the Planning Inspector and will be the main point of contact for members of the public through the EiP.

During the Examination in Public stage the Council may propose Main Modifications to the document, if these are needed to make it “sound”. If this is the case further consultation on the proposed changes will be carried out.

### **Adoption of the Local Plan**

Following the conclusion of the EiP the Inspector will produce a report setting out any changes the Borough Council must make to the document before it can be adopted. The Inspectors Report and its recommendations are binding on the Council (i.e. the Council must accept these changes should it take forward the Local Plan to adoption).

Should the Council seek to adopt the Local Plan, the modifications suggested by the Inspector must be undertaken and then a formal decision must be made by Council Members to adopt the Local Plan for planning purposes.

Following a Member decision to adopt, the Council must notify all consultees registered on the Planning Policy Consultation Database of their intention to adopt the document for planning purposes. A notice of adoption will be placed in all relevant newspaper press and will include information on the statutory rights of appeal.

### **Supplementary Plans**

Supplementary Plans (SPs) relate to specific sites or specific planning issues and have the same weight as a local plan for the purpose of decision-making. This would also include Infrastructure Levy regimes to apply at the local level for securing developer contributions in the future.

There is a three-stage process for the preparation of Supplementary Plans, this includes:

- Evidence Gathering
- The Preparation and Consultation of a Draft Supplementary Plan
- The Adoption of the SPs by Stafford Borough Council

The key principles for community involvement which are applied to the preparation of Local Plans equally applies to the preparation of Supplementary Plans.

The approach to community involvement will remain to engage as many people who are interested in the issue / area as possible although it should be recognised that there is little value in engaging groups whose interests may lie outside both the geographical scope and the subject scope of the document consultation. Any community involvement on SPs should be relevant, proportionate and efficient.

The Borough Council will arrange for an independent Inspector to examine the Supplementary Plan. Prior to the Examination, the Borough Council must publish an advert notifying the public, including any interested parties, about details of the Examination.

The procedure for the examination of supplementary plans is set out in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 Section 15DB.

## **Neighbourhood Plans**

### **Designation of Neighbourhood Plan Area**

A Parish Council or Neighbourhood Forum can submit an application to the Borough Council requesting for a Neighbourhood Plan Area to be designated.

The Borough Council will publicise the Neighbourhood Plan Area Application and carry out a statutory consultation for a period of 4 weeks before it is considered for designation as a Neighbourhood Plan Area. The Borough Council will then publish details of its decision, including a map of the designated area.

### **Preparation of Neighbourhood Plan**

The Parish Council or Neighbourhood Forum will prepare their Neighbourhood Plan in accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012, and the Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017. This involves collecting evidence, engagement and consultation with the local community on issues and options, and developing draft planning policies for inclusion in the Neighbourhood Plan.

The Borough Council will provide assistance and advice to the Parish Council or Neighbourhood Forum throughout the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan in a timely manner when requested. Prior to the draft Neighbourhood Plan being subject to consultation, the Borough Council will prepare a Screening Report to assess the environmental implications. The Screening Report will be subject to a six-week consultation exercise with the statutory environmental agencies. Submission and Publication.

The Parish Council or Neighbourhood Forum are required to submit the Neighbourhood Plan to the Borough Council who will then publish the proposed Neighbourhood Plan for a six-week period of consultation. The Borough Council will notify all relevant stakeholders and invite comments during the consultation stage.

### **Examination**

The Borough Council will arrange for an independent Inspector to examine the Neighbourhood Plan. Prior to the Examination, the Borough Council must publish an advert notifying the public, including any interested parties, about details of the Examination.

### **Adoption of Neighbourhood Plan**

Following receipt of the Inspector's Report, this recommends any changes required and whether the Neighbourhood Plan can proceed to a referendum (vote).

The Council will publish the Inspector's Report and arrange a referendum. If the Neighbourhood Plan is successful at referendum (achieved more than a 50% yes vote) the Borough Council will then adopt the Neighbourhood Plan and it will be used in the determination of Planning Applications in the Neighbourhood Plan Area.

**Note:** The Parish Council or Neighbourhood Forum preparing a Neighbourhood Plan is responsible for undertaking community engagement and consultation before the proposed Plan is submitted. Consulting with the wider community in the early plan making process could increase the likelihood of the Neighbourhood Plan being successful at the referendum stage.

## **Planning Policy Consultations**

### **Who we will consult**

In the preparation of Planning Policy Documents, a wide range of individuals, groups, representatives and organisations will be consulted.

In line with statutory obligations, the Borough Council is required to provide a 'specific consultation' list of statutory organisations who must be consulted (please see Appendix 1) and a 'general consultation' list of those who may wish to be consulted (please see Appendix 2) on Planning Policy Documents. These lists of bodies are not definitive and the Borough Council may need to consult with other organisations at the appropriate time.

Stafford Borough Council wants to ensure that all stakeholders have every opportunity to be involved with the preparation of Planning Policy Documents and no groups/organisations and individuals, including hard to reach groups, are excluded.

Stafford Borough Council maintains a database of over 3,000 consultees, which largely consists of those who have expressed an interest in being involved in the preparation of Planning Policy Documents. These are identified as key stakeholders and are shown in the table below.

*Table 1: Key Stakeholders*

Local Interest Groups	Residents	Businesses	Individuals
Neighbouring Local Authorities	Statutory Organisations	Land Owners	Councillors and MPs
Voluntary and Community Groups	Parish Councils	Developers	Hard to Reach Groups

Any resident, business or interested party can be included in this database by contacting the Borough Council’s Strategic Planning and Placemaking team on 01785 619000. The Borough Council will comply with the General Data Protection Regulations (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 to ensure personal information is kept confidential and secure.

### **Duty to Cooperate / Statement of Common Ground**

The Council has previously been required, under Section 110 of the Localism Act 2011, to engage with neighbouring authorities and other statutory organisations to satisfy the ‘Duty to Cooperate’ legal requirement, including where appropriate through Statements of Common Ground. This was to ensure that neighbouring authorities and relevant organisations work together to meet development requirements and address any strategic cross boundary issues.

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 removed the need for Duty to Cooperate to streamline the plan-making process. Nevertheless authorities still need to collaborate across their boundaries, including on unmet development needs from neighbouring areas in line with National Planning Policy Framework policies which stipulate ‘maintaining effective cooperation.’

Stafford Borough Council has worked closely with all relevant Duty to Cooperate organisations throughout the production of the adopted Plan for Stafford Borough. The Borough Council remains committed to effective cross-boundary collaboration in the preparation of future Planning Policy Documents.

### **How we will consult**

Stafford Borough Council will use a range of methods to involve local people and strengthen community involvement. The table below describes the various methods used for consulting on Planning Policy Documents.

*Table 2: Methods for consulting on planning policy documents*

Letters and Emails	Letters and emails sent out to notify relevant stakeholders about a consultation on Planning Policy Documents
Parish Forum Meetings	Attendance at Parish Forum meetings to provide Parish Councils with information on Planning Policy Documents
Display boards	Display boards are set up in the reception of Council Offices to raise awareness of consultation on Planning Policy Documents and how people can get involved
Public Exhibitions and Workshops	Exhibitions are set up in various locations across the Borough to provide information on Planning Policy Documents. Workshops are organised to gather information and feedback from members of the public and other stakeholders to help inform Planning Policy Documents
Press Release / Notice	Press releases / notices are issued to the local newspapers and local radio stations to raise awareness about consultation on Planning Policy Documents
Libraries	Hard copies of Planning Policy Documents, with response forms, are distributed to local Libraries for people to view and make comments
Council website <a href="http://www.staffordbc.gov.uk">www.staffordbc.gov.uk</a>	Details of Planning Policy Documents are published on the website for the public to view, including details of the consultation and how to respond

### **What we will do with your comments**

All representations will receive an automatic acknowledgement of the representation if received by email. The Borough Council will also accept comments by letter and will process them in the same manner as other representations.

All representations will be electronically recorded and then published on the Borough Council's website, or through the Neighbourhood Planning Bodies website as relevant, for the public to view. They will be considered and used to help inform the production of Planning Policy Documents

### **Monitoring and Review**

Stafford Borough Council is committed to strengthening local community participation and stakeholder involvement in the planning process.

Each year the Council monitors and reviews the progress and effectiveness of the Local Plan in an annual Authority Monitoring Report. In addition, and where appropriate, the Council will carry out a periodic review of the Local Plan.

In accordance with the Authority Monitoring Report, the Council will also review consultation activities that have been carried out in accordance with the Statement of Community Involvement. This is to ensure the methods and techniques used to engage with all stakeholders of the community are effective and robust.

The Council will use the following indicators to measure outcomes.

- Number of people participating in consultation
- Number of people using the Council's online website to make representations

If significant changes are required to meet new circumstances or legislation changes, a review of the Communications and Engagement Strategy will be undertaken.

## Engagement tools

	Development Plan Documents						Supplementary Plans			Neighbourhood Plans				Community Infrastructure Levy			
Method	Evidence Gathering and Early Engagement – where relevant Brownfield Land	Brownfield Land Register - Call for Sites	Development of Policy Options	Publication and Submission	Examination in Public	Adoption	Publication of Draft SP	Examination in Public	Adoption	Designate Neighbourhood Plan	Submission and Publication	Examination	Adoption	Preliminary Draft Charging Schedule	Draft Charging Schedule	Examination in Public	Adoption
Letters and Emails	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Parish Forum Meeting			X														
Display boards			X														
Public exhibition and workshop			X														
Press Release/Notice		X	X		X	X	X	X	X								
Libraries		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X		X
Council website	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Online Q and A Session			X	X			X										

## **How can I have my say on this consultation document?**

Consultation on the new Local Plan 2025-2045: Engagement and Communication Strategy will take place between 8 June and 28 July 2026. Please provide any responses by 12 noon on Tuesday 28 July 2026.

We strongly encourage responses to be made using the pro-forma available on the Council's website at [www.staffordbc.gov.uk/strategic-planning-and-placemaking-consultations](http://www.staffordbc.gov.uk/strategic-planning-and-placemaking-consultations) and emailing completed forms to [strategicplanningconsultations@staffordbc.gov.uk](mailto:strategicplanningconsultations@staffordbc.gov.uk)

Alternatively, if you choose to use email please identify the question, section or page number to which your comments refer.

## **How will my comments be used?**

We will acknowledge receipt of your comments and fully consider responses for the next stage of the plan-making process, although the Council will not engage through individual correspondence. All comments received will be published on the Council's website in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018.

## **Protecting Your Privacy**

We believe you should always know what data we collect from you and how we use it, and that you should have meaningful control over both. As part of our ongoing commitment to transparency, and in relation to the General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018, we have updated our Privacy Policy.

We will only use your personal information to send you information on the Local Plan and associated planning policy matters. You can find information about how we handle your personal data by visiting [www.staffordbc.gov.uk/privacynotices](http://www.staffordbc.gov.uk/privacynotices) and if you have any queries or would like to unsubscribe from receiving information please contact the Strategic Planning and Placemaking team using the details above.

## **Appendix 1: Specific Organisation Bodies for Plan Making**

Active Travel England

Local telecommunication providers

Canal and River Trust

Civil Aviation Authority

Coal Authority

Sport England

Environment Agency

Forestry England

National Highways

Historic England

Homes England

NHS Property Services

University Hospitals of North Midlands Trust

Public Health Commissioning Leads and Strategic Delivery Managers at  
Staffordshire County Council

Midlands Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent ICB

Local gas and electricity providers

Local sewerage and water providers

Marine Management Organisation

Natural England

Neighbourhood Planning Bodies (Parish Councils / Neighbourhood Forums)

Network Rail Infrastructure Limited

Transport for West Midlands

Office for Nuclear Regulation

Office of Rail and Road

Adjoining Local Planning Authorities

Town and Parish Councils within Stafford Borough as well as those adjoining the Borough

Staffordshire County Council (including Highways Authority, Lead Education Authority, Lead Local Flooding Authority and Local Nature Recovery Strategy)

Staffordshire Police, Fire and Rescue and Crime Commissioner

## **Appendix 2: General Consultation Bodies for Plan Making**

Airport Operators' Association

Amenity groups

Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Charities

Civic Societies

Community groups and residents' associations

Countryside / conservation groups

Culture, Recreation and Faith groups

Defence Infrastructure Organisation

Disability groups

Ethnic minority groups

Members of the General Public

Health groups

Home Builders Federation

Housing interest groups and housing associations

Inland Waterways Association

Landowners and Developers

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender groups

Local business groups

Local Councillors and MPs

Local Canal Societies

Local interest groups

Local media

Local Public Transport Providers

National Association of Gypsy and Traveller Officers, The National Federation of Gypsy Liaison Groups, and the Gypsy Council

Older groups

Railway Infrastructure Managers including HS2

Staffordshire Wildlife Trust

Transport for London

Voluntary and Community Infrastructure Organisation (VAST)

Woodland Trust

Young Persons group

Ministry of Defence

Support Staffordshire