



Local Plan 2020-2040

Connections Topic Paper (Preferred Options Stage)

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1. Policy Context

National

National Planning Policy Framework 2021

- 1.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF; <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>) sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied. The NPPF was last updated in July 2021 and provides a guidance framework within which locally prepared plans for housing and other development can be produced.
- 1.2 The NPPF supports promoting sustainable transport as can be seen in Chapter 9, which emphasises that transport issues should be considered from the earliest stages of plan-making and development proposals. This will ensure that the potential impacts of development can be addressed, and opportunities can be realised, including promoting walking, cyclic and public transport, and mitigating adverse environmental effects.

Climate Change Act 2008

- 1.3 The Climate Change Act 2008 sets a legal framework for the UK to cut greenhouse gas emissions to 80% below 1990 levels by 2050. As transport represents a large proportion of total UK gas emissions, action must be made to reduce gas emissions produced by transport to meet this target.

Decarbonising transport: a better, greener Britain

- 1.4 The government sets out their commitments and actions needed to decarbonize the entire transport system in the UK in the 'Decarbonising transport: a better, greener Britain' plan (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1009448/decarbonising-transport-a-better-greener-britain.pdf) published in July 2021. It includes a pathway to net zero transport in the UK, the wider benefits net zero transport can deliver, and the principle that underpin their approach to delivering net zero transport. The strategic priorities to reach these commitments are to accelerate a modal shift to public and active transport, decarbonise road transport, and decarbonise how we get our goods.

Road to Zero Strategy

- 1.5 The Road to Zero Strategy (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reducing-emissions-from-road-transport-road-to-zero-strategy>) was published in 2018 and provides next steps towards cleaner road transport and delivering the UK's Industrial Strategy, with the ambition that by 2050 almost every car and van will be zero emission. To meet this target, the aim is for the UK to stop selling petrol and diesel vehicles by 2040, with the majority of new cars and vans sold to be

100% zero emission and all new cars and vans to have significant zero emission capability.

National Bus Strategy for England

- 1.6 The national bus strategy for England, 'Bus Back Better' (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bus-back-better>), was published by the Department for Transport in 2021 and sets out the Government's vision and objectives for bus services throughout England. The objectives include making buses more frequent, reliable, cheaper, easier to understand and use, better to ride in and greener.

Electric vehicle smart charging

- 1.7 In July 2021 the Department for Transport published the 'Electric vehicle smart charging government response', which was a response to a consultation on smart charging. The outcome sets out the government's response and policy proposals, with draft legislation 'The Electric Vehicles (Smart Charge Points) Regulations 2021' (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2021/9780348228434/part/2>) being laid in Parliament on 28 October 2021 mandating that private charge points must be smart and meet minimum device-level requirements. A further press release was issued on Monday 22 November, during which the government announced that under new legislation new homes and buildings such as supermarkets and workplaces, as well as those undergoing major renovation, will be required to install electric vehicle charge points. These changes have now been brought into effect through the Building Regulations.

Gear change: a bold vision for cycling and walking

- 1.8 The Department for Transport published 'Gear change: a bold vision for cycling and walking' in July 2020 (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/904146/gear-change-a-bold-vision-for-cycling-and-walking.pdf), which details the government's vision to make England a great walking and cycling nation, by setting out actions required to make better streets for cycling and people, to put cycling and walking at the heart of decision-making, and to enable and protect people when cycling. The strategy seeks to increase active travel and to promote walking and cycling as the preferred way of making short journeys, and acknowledges how many people move around, whilst acknowledging the challenge of achieving lasting behavioral changes.

Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy

- 1.9 The governments 'Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy' was published in 2017 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cycling-and-walking-investment-strategy>), and aims to double cycling levels by 2025, increase walking activity, reduce the rate of cyclists killed or seriously injured, and increase the percentage of school children walking to school.

1.10 The 'Second Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy' (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-second-cycling-and-walking-investment-strategy/the-second-cycling-and-walking-investment-strategy-cwis2>) was published in 2022 and builds upon the first strategy by outlining objectives and financial resources for active travel across government for the period April 2021 to March 2025. The aim is to make active travel more inclusive by removing barriers that make it harder for some to walk, wheel or cycle to their destination. Active Travel England (ATE) has been created, which will set high standards for active travel infrastructure, new development design, engagement, training and behavior change. The objectives, aims and targets of the first strategy, alongside the vision set out in Gear change: a bold vision for cycling and walking (2020), have shaped the following 4 objectives to 2025 to:

- Increase the percentage of short journeys in towns and cities that are walked or cycled from 41% in 2018 - 2019, to 46% in 2025
- Increase walking activity, where walking activity is measured as the total number of walking stages per person per year, to 365 stages per person per year in 2025
- Double cycling, where cycling activity is measured as the estimated total number of cycling stages made each year, from 0.8 billion stages in 2013 to 1.6 billion stages in 2025
- Increase the percentage of children aged 5 to 10 who usually walk to school from 49% in 2014 to 55% in 2025

1.11 Walking and cycling objectives are measured in stages, as in the National Travel Survey (NTS). The basic unit of travel in the NTS is a trip, which consists of one or more stages. A new stage is defined when there is a change in the form of transport. By counting walking or cycling stages, rather than trips, allows the inclusion of journeys that involve walking or cycling but where this is not the main form of transport.

Levelling Up White Paper 2022

1.12 The Levelling Up White Paper 2022 (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1052708/Levelling_up_the_UK_white_paper.pdf) sets out how the Government will spread opportunity more equally across the UK through a number of missions. Mission 3 is specifically related to transport, with the intention that "By 2030, local public transport connectivity across the country will be significantly closer to the standards of London, with improved services, simpler fares and integrated ticketing." The mission predominately appears to focus on major urban cities, although does acknowledge that, smaller cities, towns and villages also need good public transport and high-quality local roads to ensure everyday journeys are safe and quick.

Local

Stafford Borough Corporate Business Plan (2021-2024)

- 1.13 This three-year plan (<https://www.staffordbc.gov.uk/corporate-plan>) sets out how the council will deliver and sustain economic growth, respect the environment, support communities, and ensure that the borough is a great place to live, work and visit. Within this plan, Objective 1 aims to “deliver sustainable economic and housing growth to provide income and jobs”. Over the past 3 years, the council has been awarded a £150,000 feasibility grant from Highways England for a project that will reconnect people and communities with green spaces and watercourses in their local area (Stafford Brooks Project) and have continued to monitor HS2 construction works to ensure that any adverse environmental effects are mitigated.

Staffordshire Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan

- 1.14 In support of the governments ‘Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy’, Staffordshire County Council published the ‘Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan 2021-2031’ in April 2021 (https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/Transport/transportplanning/documents/LC_WIP-Final-Report-October-2021.pdf). The plan aims to deliver better safety, better mobility and better streets, with a vision to “increase people’s connectivity through cycling and walking to employment, education and leisure, leading to positive changes in modal shift, enabling people to lead safer, healthier and more independent lives”. It was highlighted in the plan that Stafford borough and had one of the most extensive cycle networks and had the highest performing walking zone. The report also highlighted infrastructure priorities, some of which could be funded via HS2 such as improving footway / cycling provision from Yarnfield to Stone, Swynnerton to Stone, Stone to Stafford and Hopton to Sandon Road, Stafford.

Staffordshire Local Transport Plan

- 1.15 Staffordshire County Council published the Staffordshire Local Transport Plan in 2011 (<https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/Transport/transportplanning/localtransportplan/home.aspx>). The plan sets out the County Council’s proposals for transport provision in the county, including walking, cycling, public transport, car-based travel and freight, together with the management and maintenance of local roads and footways. The plan considers the following challenges:
- Supporting growth and regeneration;
 - Maintaining the highway network;
 - Making transport easier to use and places easier to get to;
 - Improving safety and security;

- Reducing road transport emissions and their effects on the highway network;
- Improving health and quality of life; and
- Respecting the environment.

1.16 The County Council have indicated during the Issues and Options consultation that the Staffordshire Local Transport Plan 2011 is outdated and there is no plan to revise the document.

Stafford Borough Integrated Transport Strategy 2013-2031

1.17 During the period 2013 to 2018, Staffordshire County Council also produced district / borough Integrated Transport Strategies to reflect the transport challenges and opportunities faced in each district / borough. The Stafford Borough Integrated Transport Strategy (<https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/Transport/transportplanning/documents/Documents/Stafford-Transport.pdf>) raised the following Economic Prosperity and Community priorities for Stafford borough:

- Accommodate strategic employment and housing greenfield sites in Stafford, including new highway capacity
- Provide highway capacity and sustainable transport connectivity to support economic and retail growth in Stafford town centre
- Manage peak hour traffic levels and resulting carbon emissions on Stafford's radial routes
- Support sustainable development in Stone that does not undermine the regeneration of North Staffordshire
- Maintain the current condition and safety of the highway network
- Improve public transport connectivity and quality of life for local communities
- Raise awareness of environmental issues and encourage people to lead more sustainable lifestyles, helping to reduce carbon emissions, with both short term and long term proposed strategies to address these.

1.18 To deliver these priorities, the strategy proposes both short term (3 years) and long term (up to 2031) delivery, through a combination of countywide initiatives, connectivity proposals in the borough, schemes identified in the Divisional Highway Programme and Local Transport Packages.

2. Local Context

- 2.1 Transport is an essential part of everyday life and a key consideration when making planning decisions; it enables us to visit family and friends, commute to work, access healthcare, education, shopping and leisure activities, and it supports a healthy and vibrant economy. Good transport connections are integral to our plans for economic growth and protecting our environment to ensure a sustainable future for all and so must be considered early in the development process.
- 2.2 As the UK aims to reach net zero emissions by 2050, reducing emissions from road transport is a significant challenge. Road traffic in Great Britain has increased from 255 billion miles travelled in 1990 to 328 billion miles in 2018, which is an increase of 29%. Road transport greenhouse gas emissions represent a fifth of total UK gas emissions (<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/articles/roadtransportandairmissions/2019-09-16>). At the end of 2018, only 0.5% of all licensed vehicles were ultra-low emission vehicles.
- 2.3 The Staffordshire Climate Change Adaptation & Mitigation Baseline Report (AECOM, 2020; https://www.staffordbc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/cme/DocMan1/Planning%20Policy/New%20Stafford%20Borough%20Local%20Plan%202020-2040/Evidence%20Base%20Documents/Staffordshire_Final%20Report_Rev03%20%28Updates%29_2020-10-16_Accessibility_Comp....pdf) highlights that road transport is the biggest source of greenhouse gas emissions in Stafford Borough, accounting for 43% of the borough's emissions. This emphasises the need to decarbonise transport by increasing active travel and public transport use, and moving to low or zero emission vehicles.
- 2.4 Stafford borough has excellent transport links, including the M6, West Coast Mainline rail and in future will be served by High Speed 2 (HS2). Although the borough is relatively self-contained, there are important economic linkages with both the West Midlands and north Staffordshire conurbations.
- 2.5 Supporting and enhancing access to services and facilities is important for achieving sustainable development in the borough. Stafford borough is a diverse area and is predominantly rural, with Stafford, Stone and the villages providing services and facilities to the rural areas. The availability of public transport and walking and cycling facilities varies across the borough.
- 2.6 Stafford borough faces three key transport challenges:
- Maximising access to services and reducing the need to travel
 - Ensuring that significant development is delivered in those locations which are, or can be made, accessible by a range of transport modes
 - Decarbonising transport by increasing active travel and public transport use and moving to low or zero emission vehicles

2.7 The following section details the existing infrastructure throughout the borough.

Highways

2.8 The main link up through Stafford borough is the M6, with junction 14 located to the north of Stafford and junction 13 located to the south outside of the borough boundary. The M6 is maintained by Highways England and is part of their Strategic Road Network (SRN). There have been recent works to upgrade the M6 from junction 13 to junction 15 to a smart motorway and works to improve junction 14.

2.9 The main A roads within the borough are:

- The A34 which creates a link from Cannock through Stafford to Stone and then beyond to Stoke
- The A51 is another predominately north-south link, which creates a link from Lichfield and Rugeley to Stone and northwards out of the borough
- The A518 is an east-west link across the borough, from Uttoxeter to Stafford, and onwards to Newport via Gnosall

2.10 There has been recent ongoing work around Stafford to upgrade the highways infrastructure such as the completion of the Stafford Western Access Route, which is a multi-million-pound project to boost growth and ease congestion in Stafford town centre (<https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/Highways/roadworks/stafford/westernaccess/proposedstaffordwesternbypass.aspx>). The scheme will improve traffic flow, and include improved conditions for bus services, pedestrians and cyclists. There will also be environmental benefits through the redevelopment of areas of derelict land and landscaping along the route.

Public Transport

2.11 Stafford Borough has good north-south rail links, with the West Coast Main Line running through Stafford which offers good connection to Birmingham, London, and cities to the north. HS2 will run through Stafford and will reduce journey times to London. However, the east-west connections across the borough are road based with no rail connections.

2.12 There are bus services which run across the borough and localised services around Stafford. The majority of these are provided on a commercial basis by private bus operators. The bus routes follow key links from Stafford, such as Stafford to Lichfield, Stafford to Telford, Stafford to Walsall, Stafford to Hanley via Stone, Stafford to Uttoxeter, Stafford to Wolverhampton and Stafford to Eccleshall. These services do stop at some of the larger rural settlements such as Gnosall, Hixon and Weston, but many of the smaller settlements have infrequent or no bus service.

- 2.13 Staffordshire County Council provide some school buses to enable pupils to get to and from schools across the borough.

Footways and Cycle Paths

- 2.14 Stafford Borough has an extensive range of footways, cycle paths and towpaths. These include:
- The Stafford to Newport Greenway, via Gnosall, which also forms part of the National Cycle Network route 55
 - National Cycle Network route 5 which links Stoke-on-Trent to Stone and Stafford, via Aston Marina, and finishes in Baswich
 - The Way for the Millennium which crosses Staffordshire from Newport to Stafford via Gnosall, and then to Rugeley, via Milford and Great Haywood and beyond to Burton Upon Trent
 - The Staffordshire Way, which starts in the north of Staffordshire and runs outside the borough boundary before coming round the outskirts of Great and Little Haywood onto Shugborough and Cannock Chase and beyond southwards
 - The Trent and Mersey Canal, Shropshire Union Canal and the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal
- 2.15 Staffordshire County Council is responsible for the maintenance of Public Rights of Way, footways and cycleways across Staffordshire, with Parish Councils also having power to maintain footways or bridleways in their area. Canals and their towpaths are maintained by The Canal & River Trust.

Electric vehicle charging points

- 2.16 In Stafford borough, there are currently 105 electric vehicle charging points across 29 sites. Funding has recently been approved from the governments 'Low Emission Taxi Infrastructure Scheme' to provide electric vehicle charging facilities to car parks in the borough as part of a scheme to help taxi drivers go green. The public will also be able to use some of the charging facilities (<https://www.staffordbc.gov.uk/news/electric-charging-facilities-help-cabbies-stafford-borough-go-green>).

3. Issues and Opportunities

Issues

- 3.1 The issues related to transport that relate to Stafford borough are similar to those identified nationwide:
- Road transport is the biggest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the borough

- The geography of the borough means that some rural areas are not serviced by public transport
- The majority of public transport is owned and operated by the private sector
- Electric charging points are not widely available
- Active transport can be difficult to encourage

Opportunities

3.2 The potential opportunities in relation to transport are as follows:

- Development will be directed to the larger settlements which can be seen as being more sustainable in terms of accessing facilities and services
- New development schemes will be required to provide or enhance public transport which could deliver public transport to rural areas
- New development will be required to provide electric charging vehicle points under new legislation
- The new garden community at Meecebrook has good transport connectivity opportunities, so could be highly sustainable

4. Implications of Drivers for Change

4.1 The main identified drivers for change are identified as:

- National policy requirements via legislation 'The Electric Vehicles (Smart Charge Points) Regulations 2021', National Planning Policy Framework;
- The target to be net zero by 2050

5. Objectives

5.1 There are three main aims for transport in the preferred options draft new local plan:

- Contribute to Stafford Borough being net zero carbon by ensuring that development mitigates and adapts to climate change and is future proof
- To deliver infrastructure led growth supported by accessible services and facilities
- To provide an attractive place to live and work and support strong communities that promote health and wellbeing

6. Issues and Options Consultation

6.1 The Issues and Options consultation took place in Spring 2020 and asked for the opinions from the public and key stakeholders surrounding key issues within the borough to help develop the preferred option. The Issues and

Options Summary Report summarises responses to connections in Section 12.

- 6.2 There were five primary areas of discussion related to transport: public transport, cycling and walking, the decarbonisation of personal motorised transport, sustainability and the environment, and specific comments in relation to the proposed Garden Community.
- 6.3 A high proportion of the responses to transport related to the provision of public transport, with it suggested that new development should be designed for public transport, and large developments should redress public transport gaps. The provision and improvement of public transport would improve travel to work and should be encouraged in the borough's smaller settlements to improve their sustainability and provide opportunity for sustainable expansion.
- 6.4 In terms of sustainability there was a broad consensus that the proposed issues and options approach to delivering sustainable transport were heading in the right direction but did not go far enough either in terms of intent or detail. Electrical infrastructure should be upgraded to support personal electric vehicles in rural areas, and new development should be designed for electric vehicle charging. Links could be made with policies on Green Infrastructure and ecological networks for example the contribution of highway verges and railway embankments.
- 6.5 It was advocated that the new local plan should support the prioritisation of active travel through safe, integrated walking and cycling routes. Suggestions were made for the creation and enhancement of walking and cycling provision throughout the borough.
- 6.6 It was suggested that if the proposed garden community is sited at Meecebrook, it would benefit from excellent connectivity to the M6 Motorway and would be linked to Stafford by road which is less than 20 minutes' drive time. The road network is already utilised by existing bus services which could have the potential of being significantly enhanced. Meecebrook could also benefit from a new set down station if investigative work determines it to be feasible and viable. Considering the above, this would make the site highly sustainable due to its transport connectivity.

7. Policy

- 7.1 As this topic paper sets out, there is a need and a local desire for transport policies to be central to the emerging local plan.

POLICY 52: Transport

A. Proposed development shall:

- 1. Be located and designed to minimise the need to travel;

2. Prioritise sustainable travel by providing and where appropriate facilitating the upgrade of convenient and safe connections to and infrastructure for walking (including wheelchair users, mobility scooters and pushchairs), cycling and the use of public transport;
 3. Consider the impact of development on the wider transport network and contribute to meeting the wider strategic transport infrastructure needs generated by the impact of development in the area;
 4. Mitigate the environmental impacts of transport, including impacts on air quality, noise pollution and landscape character;
 5. Protect, and where possible enhance, public rights of way and access;
 6. Provide safe and suitable access for all potential users;
 7. Not cause unacceptable highway safety issues; and
 8. Avoid severe residual cumulative impacts on the road network.
- B. Points of access and on-site layouts should be designed in accordance with Manual for Streets to prioritise walking and cycling.

POLICY 53: Parking standards

- A. Car and bicycle parking shall be provided in accordance with the standards set out in Appendix 4.
- B. Levels of car parking provision (but not) below the levels set out in the standards in Appendix 4 will be accepted where this is clearly justified having regard to:
1. The quality of the site's accessibility by walking, cycling and public transport; and/or
 2. The measures both on-site and off-site that are proposed to improve accessibility by non-car modes; and/or
 3. The content of a travel plan, in particular the targets, measures and the parking management regime; and/or
 4. The predicted traffic generation; and/or
 5. The ability of a mixed-use development to share parking spaces due to operational arrangements of the different land uses; and/or
 6. The scope for the development to use existing and conveniently available public car parking supply in off-peak periods.