

Dear Members

**Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny Committee**

A meeting of the Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny Committee will be held in the **Craddock Room, Civic Centre, Riverside Stafford** on **Tuesday 10 June 2025 at 6.30pm** to deal with the business as set out on the agenda.

Please note that this meeting will be recorded.

Members are reminded that contact officers are shown at the top of each report and members are welcome to raise questions etc in advance of the meeting with the appropriate officer.



Head of Law and Governance

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

10 JUNE 2025

Chair - Councillor F Beatty

## AGENDA

- 1 Minutes of 13 March 2025 as previously published on the Council's website.
- 2 Apologies
- 3 Public Question Time - Nil
- 4 Councillor Session - Nil
- 5 Members' Items - Nil
- 6 Called In Items - Nil

### Page Nos

- 7 Officers' Reports
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| ITEM NO 7(a) | <b>Planning External Review Feedback</b>  | 3 - 24  |
|              | HEAD OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING |         |
| ITEM NO 7(b) | <b>New Local Plan 2025 - 2045</b>         | 25 - 38 |
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| ITEM NO 7(c) | <b>UKSPF 2022-25</b>                      | 39 - 43 |
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| ITEM No 7(d) | <b>Work Programme</b>                     | 44 - 47 |
|              | HEAD OF LAW AND GOVERNANCE                |         |

## Membership

Chair - Councillor F Beatty

F Beatty	A M Loughran
B M Cross	B McKeown
P C Edgeller	D M McNaughton
F D J James	J S Powell
P W Jones	D P Rouxel

**Agenda Item 7(a)**

# Development Management - External Review Outcome and Resource Request 2025/26

<b>Committee:</b>	Cabinet
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	15 May 2025
<b>Report of:</b>	Head of Economic Development and Planning
<b>Portfolio:</b>	Economic Development and Planning

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## 1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This update report aims to inform Cabinet on the outcome of the external independent review of the Council's Development Management service and set out next steps.

## 2 Recommendations

That: -

- 2.1 Cabinet notes the report, the findings of the external review at Appendix 1, and notes the Service Plan and Improvement Plan set out at Appendix 2 and 3.
- 2.2 That Cabinet agree to the resource proposals for Development Management and Planning Enforcement for 2025/26 which will maintain current service delivery whilst the improvement plan is being implemented.
- 2.3 That Cabinet recommends to Council the drawdown of £234,790 from planning/ fee reserves to fund agency staff to maintain service delivery whilst the improvement plan is being implemented and funding for consultancy support to support delivery of the improvement plan. The funding will be in addition to the approved 2025/26 budget.

### Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.4 Development Management is a key statutory service of the Council, and Cabinet have requested an update on the external review of the service.

### **3 Key Issues**

- 3.1 The Cabinet has received various reports setting out the issues facing the Development Management (DM) service at SBC and has received an overview of the measures being taken by officers to improve performance, tackle backlogs, reduce complaints and increase confidence in the service from key customers.
- 3.2 To address issues with the service and improve performance, the Council has commissioned consultants to undertake an independent review and work to develop an improvement plan for the service, identifying clear actions and resource requirements.

### **4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities**

- 4.1 The Development Management service contributes to the delivery of all the Council's corporate priorities.

### **5 Report Detail**

#### **Background**

- 5.1 To help address issues within the Council's Development Management service and improve service delivery and value for money, the Council has commissioned an external independent review of the service.
- 5.2 An organisation called Mondrem were appointed in October 2024 to undertake the review. Mondrem are a not-for profit social enterprise whose purpose is to improve public services, and they are based on the Science and Innovation Park at Keele University. Mondrem have worked with more than 30 local authority planning services on a variety of projects, including supporting local planning services with performance challenges to become exemplar and to help good services become better. Many of the reviews they have undertaken have been run alongside corporate transformation initiatives.
- 5.3 The output of the review is an improvement plan for the next 12 months, including clear recommendations, actions, and resource requirements. The review has considered wider transformation options and recommendations for the sharing of SBC and Cannock Chase Council's Development Management Service. Members have been involved in the review, along with key stakeholders and agents/applicants.

#### **The scope of the review**

- 5.4 The review has covered all elements of the Development Management service, from pre-application, validation, assessment of applications, determination of applications, appeals, planning enforcement and process/systems.

## Review objectives

5.5 The objectives are as follows:

- To help the service meet its statutory requirements
- To help the service play its part in delivering corporate priorities and objectives
- To provide a baseline assessment of performance and service delivery
- To understand the team's workload and capacity to do it now and in the future
- To show how the service can increase productivity
- To show how the service can improve efficiency
- To help make sure that the Council can deliver high performance consistently
- To explore the service's role in promoting economic development in the Borough
- To explore how the service can help attract investment to the Borough
- To explore how the service can offer a solution-focused approach
- To assess the relationship between the Development Management (DM) and planning policy team and developing and delivering the local plan
- To co-design a short-term implementation plan and transformation options assessment that will help you deliver the required short-term improvements and longer-term vision
- To help you and the planning team to connect with, value and want to drive an improvement project based on this plan
- To identify how the Council can deliver its ambition for a great Development Management service in a realistic timeframe
- To help identify a preferred operating model for each element of the service
- To identify the resources and capacity needed to deliver transformation
- To explore how these and other resource needs can be met within the approved budget
- To set out any additional budget and resources that may be needed

## Review - findings

5.6 Mondrem held 51 confidential, semi-structured interviews with the team, customers and stakeholders to understand how things are now, what would be better and any barriers there are to making improvements. Thematic qualitative analysis of these interviews, along with quantitative analysis of workload and capacity was delivered first to the Operational Management team in December 2024 and then to the wider planning teams in January 2025.

5.7 The findings of the consultant are set out in a report at **APPENDIX 1**.

- 5.8 High levels of work-in-progress remains a major barrier to making changes happen, despite intense and successful efforts to reduce the number of undetermined applications on hand. Responding to “failure demand” caused by high levels of work in progress requires additional resources and costs the service more money.
- 5.9 Mondrem facilitated workshops with the whole planning service during January 2025, in which the team drafted a purpose statement, a vision statement and co-designed a service plan (Appendix 2 – service plan) to deliver the vision.
- 5.10 The planning service has subsequently spent time working with Mondrem to develop an Improvement Plan (Appendix 3 - improvement plan) to manage the activities from the service plan and to prioritise their time and resource to make improvements.
- 5.11 The service intends in their service and improvement plan to:
- Reduce workloads to healthy levels by setting a stretch target to reduce work in progress i.e. numbers of on-hand planning applications and applications awaiting validation. This will be instigated via ‘Short Interval Management’ which focuses on streamlining processes/procedures and intense management of performance and caseloads with the aim of significantly improving productivity levels of the service.
  - To provide options and recommendations for increasing income from non-statutory services like Planning Performance Agreements for major applications and providing a timely, reliable, paid-for preapplication advice offering for all other application types.
  - Create a trusting and confident culture for the whole planning service.
  - Communicate better with customers.
  - Set new performance metrics.
- 5.12 This work must be supported by the wider Council to deliver success. Leadership Team and the planning team acknowledge the challenging environment that the planning team have been operating in for a sustained period, this has been identified in the feedback from the consultant. The planning team now need to enact their improvement plan and will be supported by Leadership Team to do things differently, learn new skills, and change processes and procedures with the aim of building trust in the service. There will be resources provided to support delivery of the plan but in return there will be accountability for making progress and challenge applied throughout the lifetime of the project.

### **Next steps**

- 5.13 The delivery of the improvement plan requires good governance and project management to ensure that project progress, as well as risks and issues with progress are transparent and that issues can be escalated and resolved as early as possible.
- 5.14 A Project Initiation Document (Appendix 4) has been agreed by Leadership Team and a Project Board chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive - Place has been established and will meet regularly during the lifetime of the project. The team is fully engaged and bought into the project.
- 5.15 As set out in the report there is the potential that the full benefits of the improvement plan will not be realised, but there is a willingness and desire from the team to move forward improvements to the service and work towards achieving the vision and objectives that are set out in the team's service plan.

### **Resourcing for 2025/26**

- 5.16 Officers have undertaken an assessment of the capacity and skills needed to ensure that the Development Management and Planning Enforcement functions have sufficient resources during 2025/26.

### **Development Management**

- 5.17 The DM service has seen a phased reduction of Agency staff over the last 12 months. A number of appointments have been made to the team at Planning Assistant and Planning Officer level which has filled vacancies, improved capacity and reduced the reliance on agency staff. There is currently 1 agency senior planner providing additional capacity for 30 hours per week.
- 5.18 Despite the recent appointments, there will be a need to continue with some agency staff during 2025/26. It will be necessary to extend the current Agency Team Leader post which is covering the vacant Deputy Development Manager role. It will also be necessary to appoint an agency Senior Planning Officer following the recent resignation of a Senior Planning Officer. To ensure continuity and resilience it is proposed to retain the use of the agency senior planner for 30 hours per week, and the agency team leader for 37 hours per week for a period of 6 months.
- 5.19 The intention is to delete the vacant Deputy Development Manager post and replace this with a third permanent Development Lead role. This will involve a review of the job role and evaluation before the recruitment process can commence. This post is necessary to ensure there is sufficient decision making capacity. The Senior Planning Officer role will also need to be advertised. Any suitable external candidate to these posts is likely to be required to give 2 or 3 months notice, hence the proposal for 6 months agency cover.

- 5.20 The re-introduction of the full pre-application service has the potential to create additional revenue which will help offset the cost of recruitment of additional staff.
- 5.21 Furthermore, as part of the Improvement Plan, the team intends to introduce Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs) for larger and more complex applications, these voluntary agreements provide applicants with an enhanced service and are particularly useful for time critical projects. The PPA may cover any part of the development process and is most often used for the pre-application to consent stage. They also provide the Council with the opportunity to generate additional income to fund additional resources to service the PPAs. The Development Manager is currently developing a PPA template and process with the intention of making this service available to applicants in Summer 2025.
- 5.22 To support delivery of the planning improvement plan, Mondrem have been retained to provide additional support to the team in relation to project management, governance, data analysis, process improvement. The cost of this support is £26,000 and will be funded from the additional budget requested which will be funded from planning fee reserve income.

### **Enforcement**

- 5.23 As reported to Cabinet in November 2024, Planning Enforcement is a discretionary service. It is not compulsory for an LPA to act against a breach of planning control or to take further action. However, the service has a high profile and there is an expectation that the Council will investigate potential breaches of planning action and act where it is expedient and deemed to be in the public interest.
- 5.24 The current staffing structure comprises 3 staff, 1 Senior Enforcement Officer and 2 Enforcement Officers, but all 3 posts are currently vacant. There is a challenge for many councils in obtaining and retaining suitable planning enforcement staff - there is a national shortage of experienced planning enforcement staff, and many experienced staff have chosen to work as agency staff due to the significantly higher remuneration.
- 5.25 In January 2025, a temporary planning enforcement provision across SBC and CCDC was introduced utilising 3 x agency Enforcement Officers with supervisory support from a permanent CCDC officer. This arrangement will be in place for at least 12 months, pending the development of a full business case for sharing.



## **Actions to be taken during 2025/26**

- 5.26 Agency Enforcement Officers are expensive, and the current budget is insufficient to fund the existing level of Agency Enforcement officers.
- 5.27 It is proposed during 2025/26 to go out externally to try to recruit 3 x FTE Enforcement Officers. The vacant roles have been reviewed and the salaries are being evaluated to ensure that the scope of role/salary is attractive, with the aim of attracting qualified and experienced candidates to reduce the need for agency Enforcement Officers.
- 5.28 However, to ensure service delivery can be maintained, there will be a need to continue with Agency provision until such time the vacant posts are filled. There is a budget implication of having 3 x FTE agency Enforcement Officers for 2025/26. The worst case financially is that it is not possible to recruit to any of the 3 Enforcement Officer vacancies, and the retention of 3 agency enforcement officers for the full year would cost £152,525 over the budgeted position. This amount will be included within the £234,790 additional budget requested for 25/26.

## **6 Implications**

### **6.1 Financial**

The cost of the external review that has already taken place has been funded from a drawdown of funds from the council's planning fee reserve.

The report requests 3 additional agency posts in relation to enforcement at a worse case for 12 months at a cost of £152,525 above the current budget. There is also additional agency costs forecast for planning as set out in paragraph 5.19, the additional cost above the budget is £56,265.00

As set out in paragraph 5.23 it is intended for Mondrem to provide ongoing support during the implementation phase of the recommendations. This will cost £26,000.

The total cost of all of the additional items is £234,790 and this will be met from the planning fee reserve.

### **6.2 Legal**

None

### **6.3 Human Resources**

None

#### **6.4 Risk Management**

A risk register will be developed for the Improvement Project. The key risks are identified in the report.

#### **6.5 Equalities and Diversity**

None

#### **6.6 Health**

None

#### **6.7 Climate Change**

None

### **7 Appendices**

None

### **8 Previous Consideration**

Cabinet - 7 November 2024 - Minute No CAB34/24

### **9 Background Papers**

None

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**Telephone Number:** 01543 464223

**Ward Interest:** All

**Report Track:** Cabinet 15 May 2025 (Only)

**Key Decision:** N/A



## Stafford DM Improvement Project

A summary of the work so far, the opportunities and risks ahead for the Chief Executive and Cabinet.

Publish Date 14-Feb-25

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## Executive Summary

In November 2024 Mondrem reviewed Stafford Borough Council's planning service and found several common goals shared between the service's staff, the leadership team, its customers and stakeholders. These included better turnaround times for planning applications, better communication with customers, elected Members and the public and making the planning service a more professionally rewarding place to work, with a better reputation.

The team has been working to identify objectives and to understand what activity will be needed to achieve their vision for the future built on these shared goals. They have an opportunity to add an extra 35-115% extra capacity by increasing productivity and reducing the number of applications 'on hand'. Changes which will prompt a shift from complaints to compliments and political pain to political calm. The team are also in the process of implementing an attractive and value-for-money preapplication advice service and developing a customer charter with a communications strategy for customers and stakeholders.

The team now need to enact their plan, be held to account for making progress on it in an organised and disciplined way and supported to try new things. They will need to learn new skills and behaviours and unlearn old ones. Some of this will be difficult and none of us is perfect, so they will likely make mistakes along the way. They will need that to be acknowledged and accepted. And to be supported when it happens. Transformation requires trust and investment, can be challenging. It requires strong, consistent leadership and observable change from the teams delivering it. The leadership of the Council, both elected and executive, can make successful outcomes more likely. And equally, has the power to quash the commitment to transformation that is so essential to its success. To do this will mean extending trust where there is none. And being prepared to bear the short-term pain that accompanies transformation efforts and keep the prize in mind. The work so far suggests the prize can be a significant one.

This report outlines what has happened in the last four months and gives an outline of the improvement project to begin building that trust in the service.

## Methodology

### Review of the planning service

Mondrem held 51 confidential, semi-structured interviews with the team, customers and stakeholders to understand how things are now, what would be better and any barriers there are to making improvements. Thematic qualitative analysis of these interviews, along with quantitative analysis of workload and capacity (Appendix 1 – feedback presentation) was delivered first to the Operational Management team in December 2024 and then to the wider planning teams in January 2024.

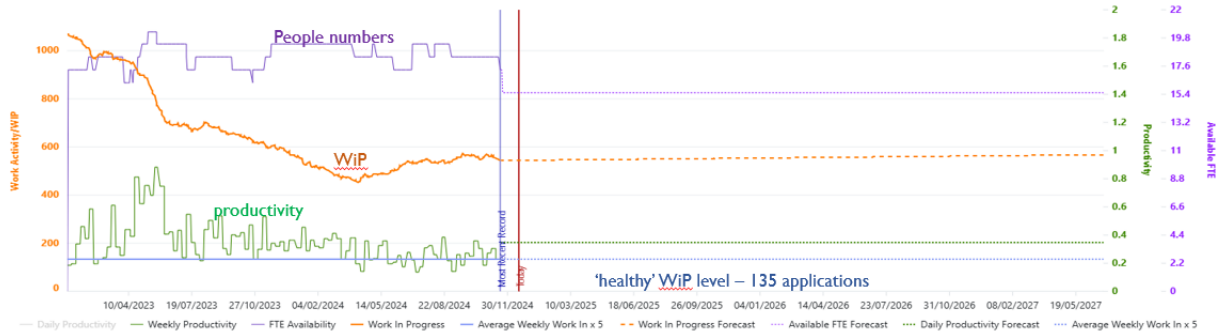
The findings of the report were that there is a cultural issue within Stafford Borough Council, not limited to the planning service, with most interviewees reporting feeling like they were not trusted by, and did not trust, their leaders. Leaders also reported that it was difficult to understand why the DM service has not been clear or convincing that they understand the issues and underperformance, nor how they will make improvements happen. Silos have formed between DM and Forward Planning and between Planning and other services within the Council. Planning budgets have been formed without the input of the Planning Manager and so budget targets are less likely to be delivered. The changes to the current Planning software, that would enable efficiency savings, have not yet been made, because the IT service understands the intention is to replace the system when the shared service is formed



with Cannock. IT also have competing priorities for their time and Planning is not at the top of their priority list.

High levels of work-in-progress remains a major barrier to making changes happen, despite intense and successful efforts to reduce the number of undetermined applications on hand. Responding to “failure demand” caused by high levels of work in progress requires additional resources and costs the service more money.

Figure 1: Total work-in-progress for Stafford Borough Council. Average productivity throughout 2023 and 2024 is 0.36 decisions per person per day. Since Jan 2024 average productivity is 0.28 decisions per person per day.



## Making plans

Mondrem facilitated a meeting for the service in January 2025 with the whole planning service, in which the team drafted a purpose statement, a vision statement and began to co-design a service plan to deliver their vision. The project then paused for 3 weeks whilst a shared understanding of expectations was agreed at Stafford. Without the shared understanding of expectations being agreed during this 3 week period, there would have been the strong prospect that the improvement project would fail in the future due to lack of visible support and scrutiny. Mondrem extended the timescales of the project through this pause at no extra cost to the Council.

The team have now developed their service plan (Appendix 2), and with support from Mondrem have drafted an improvement plan (Appendix 3) to outline the tasks and sub-tasks that will be needed to achieve the objectives they have set and allow for resource allocation. The DM Manager and Development Business Manager have also been trained on simple, effective project management and governance tools to ensure that project documentation, support and scrutiny is robustly set up, organised and disciplined.

## Supporting information

### Case studies

Mondrem have had serial success at helping LPAs to create a professionally rewarding place to work and delight customers and stakeholders with excellent service levels. In all cases, these have been achieved by a combination of protecting the team from ‘failure demand’, trusting that they are dedicated professionals who want to do a good job and creating additional capacity through increasing productivity. Each LPA’s journey has been slightly different, because the problems have been at a different scale, with different causes of depressed productivity, but the Workview charts below illustrate the real WIP reduction achieved by implementing an improvement plan along the principles that Stafford have developed.



Figure 2: A WiP chart for a DM team for a City Council in the North of England. Average productivity at the beginning of recording was 0.3 decisions per person per day, the team's productivity increased to 0.64 decisions throughout 2023 and have maintained this productivity, an increase of 113%



Figure 3: A WiP chart for a DM team in a London borough. Average productivity in 2022 was 0.7 and from 2023 onwards has been maintained at 0.93 decisions per person per day, an increase of 33%

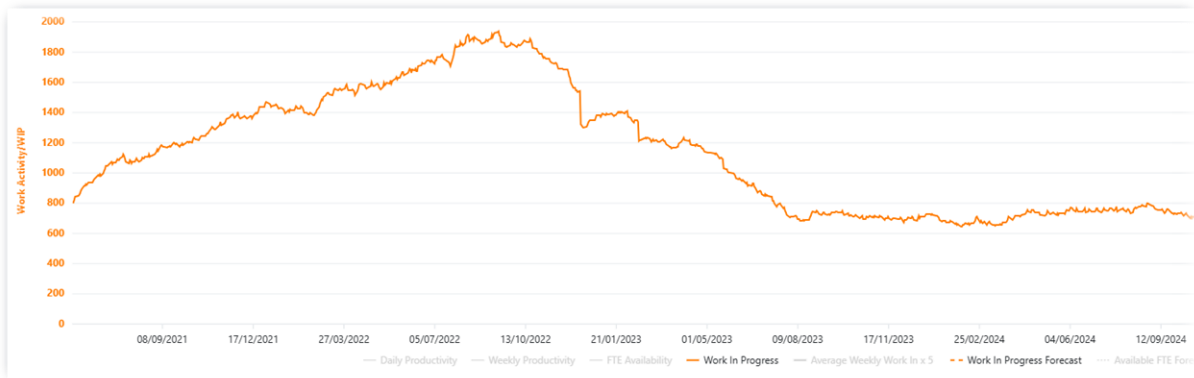


Figure 4: A WiP chart for a DM team for a City Council in Southern England. Productivity in 2023 was 0.44 decisions per person per day and 0.58 for 2024, an increase of 32%

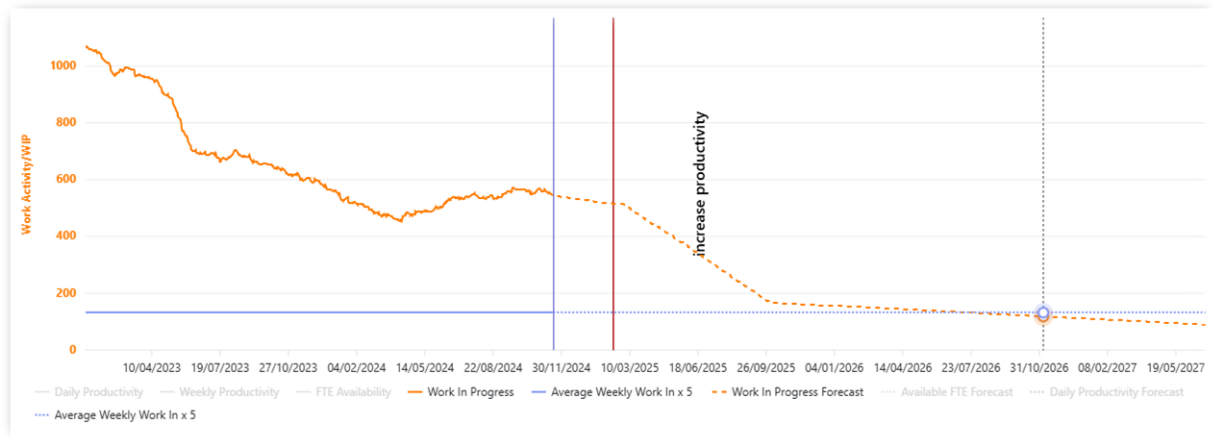


### A view of the future for Stafford

If Stafford were to increase productivity to 0.5 decisions per person per day, an increase from the long-term average of 39% then the WiP would be at 'healthy' levels by October 2025:



Figure 5: A projection of Stafford's work-in-progress if efforts to increase productivity to an average of 0.5 decisions per person per day are successful.



This would release capacity to further bring income to the service from non-statutory activity and work more closely with forward planning on enabling the Council's corporate objectives.

## Opportunities

### Objectives

The objectives the team have set themselves by February 2026 are to:

- Communicate better with customers
- Implement a charged-for preapplication advice service that almost every customer wants to use
- Produce options for a new budget for the planning service, including financial and non-financial implications of each option (towards the end of 2025 as next year's budget has already been set) including to bring the DM part of the planning service to as close to cost-neutral for the Council as possible.
- Produce a business case for Cabinet to begin charging an administrative fee for invalid, returned applications
- Make decisions on time
- Make current IT fit-for-purpose
- Communicate clear individual and collective performance metrics
- Get workloads to manageable levels

### Conditions for Success

All successful change projects rely on these components working together:

1. A named person who is fully aware of their responsibility for the project and who owns and leads it.
2. An agreed start and end date.
3. A project charter that sets out clearly and unambiguously the essential information about the project.
4. An assessment of the capacity and skills needed to deliver it and allocating the people and time needed to deliver the capacity and skills needed.
5. A project plan that is understood and followed by everyone involved.
6. A regular, formal report of progress against the project plan.
7. Regular monitoring of the project by the team involved in its work.





8. Regular, formal scrutiny of the project by a board that includes people of authority who are not actively involved in the project.
9. An agreed process to resolve and escalate risks and issues.
10. An agreed process to agree changes to the plan.

The team have a proven toolkit and templates, with guidance notes and training, to set these project components up. But your roles to provide support, challenge and scrutiny are essential. You should expect to see weekly highlight reports that set out clearly and concisely how the improvement project is going. And you should expect to see enough detail of the completed improvement plan, including who the lead officers are, and the timescales intended, to give your support to the work.

## Risks

If the team do not believe that this improvement plan is welcomed by the Council, then the project will likely not begin at the earliest opportunity.

If the Council leadership do not visibly support the vision or objectives that the team have set for themselves, then the improvements will not be delivered.

If the Council agrees the work in the improvement plan but then does not allow for resources to be allocated to it, either by demanding that current service levels and turnaround time continue or not protecting the team from the failure demand that has built up, then the improvements will not be delivered. This could give the perception of a 'battleground' culture will be given further credence, which would demotivate and demoralise the project team from making changes.

If project meetings that manage risks (including reputational risks), issues, priorities, spend against plan, resource allocation and other things that are important to make the improvement project successful don't happen then the project will likely lose pace.

If the planning service cannot prioritise new preapplication advice requests over existing applications (i.e. non-statutory activity over statutory obligations) then the front-loading essential to speeding up planning will not happen quickly enough for it to be valuable to customers, and they may stop making preapplication advice requests.

## Potential for mistakes

It's important to remember that mistakes can still happen. We are human.

When mistakes happen, ask "what can we do to help?" Encourage everyone to report mistakes quickly and transparently. Give opportunities to speak outside formal meetings, so that people can feel more comfortable about reporting mistakes. Encourage everyone to say that they are unsure what to do whenever they are unsure. If we punish people for asking questions or making mistakes, they are likely to conceal problems. That leads to bigger mistakes and failures of trust. People who are unsure what to do and carry on in ignorance are likely to make mistakes too. Being open about mistakes and gaps in understanding encourages learning, builds capability, reduces mistakes, and makes it more likely that we will be successful.



## Conclusion

The Planning Manager and Planning team are committed to making changes happen, in a way that feels different to them than anything that has ever been done before at Stafford. Forward planning and planning enforcement have been involved and engaged with shaping the DM improvement work, to make sure the project is joined up between all the elements of planning.

The team now know what they must do. But doing it will be difficult. Your part in extending trust is crucial. Winning the prize on offer will require your visible commitment to supporting the team's vision and your holding the team accountable with constructive challenge. There may be additional resources required, including extra short-term people, further workshops or training to design and embed new tools and processes or new tools, that the team need to deliver lower long-term costs and higher service levels. Endorse any robust business cases for these short-term investments, champion the team's new approach, and you will make progress towards long-term, lasting improvements.



<p>Vision</p>	<p>Stafford's planning service will be a professionally rewarding place to work with happy, motivated staff. It will deliver a trusted, confident service that turns decisions around quickly, provides reliable pre-application advice on nearly all applications and collaborates well with its customers and stakeholders.</p>						
<p>Purpose</p>	<p>To make places better and sustainable for the future. To manage/enable growth in a strategic manner, allow democracy in decision-making through managing development, and to protect heritage, and ecological assets.</p>						
<p>Area of focus Customer, Financial, Process, Learning and Growth</p>	<p>Objective</p>	<p>Outcome(s)</p>	<p>Outcome Measure(s)</p>	<p>Activity</p>	<p>Activity Measure(s)</p>	<p>Responsible officer(s)</p>	<p>Activity ref number in improvement plan</p>
<p>customer</p>	<p>communicate better with customers</p>	<p>customers report a greater certainty in the planning process, customers choose to develop in Stafford.</p>	<p>customer satisfaction rating in % of satisfied or very satisfied customers, % increase in number of applications received, number of returning customers</p>	<p>set up a customer satisfaction survey to go out with every decision notice. Implement regular agents forums as part of a communications strategy and content that includes regular 'you said, we did' type reporting</p>	<p>Number of customer satisfaction surveys responded to per month. Communications strategies in place yes/no</p>		<p>2.1 and 4.2</p>
<p>customer</p>							
<p>financial</p>	<p>implement a charged-for preapp service that almost every customer wants to use</p>	<p>income generated / costs recovered for the service, applications are quicker to process</p>	<p>% of applications that have had preapp advice, % of pre-app advice that have progressed to application, average time to determine applications that have had pre-app advice on them in days, income from pre-app advice in £, percentage of applications that have been amended</p>	<p>design a new pre-app approach with collaboration from stakeholders/statutory consultees. Agree prioritisation for pre-app advice work. Create a customer charter that sets out SLAs - especially for mid-application amendments.</p>	<p>Agreed preapp process in place yes/no. Customer charters in place yes/no</p>		<p>3.1, 3.2 and 3.3</p>
<p>financial</p>	<p>produce options for a new budget for the planning service, including financial and non-financial implications of each option.</p>	<p><i>too late to do now - budget setting is happening - prepare work for 2026 budget setting - will need a wholesale change across the council as the budget holders do not have sight of the budget.</i></p>					
<p>financial</p>	<p>produce a business case for Cabinet to begin charging an administrative fee for invalid, returned applications</p>	<p>costs are recovered for work that is done to vet/validate an application.</p>	<p>income from returned applications in £, % of applications that are valid on receipt, average time to validate in days</p>	<p>Record the time spent on making invalid applications valid. Measure the number of applications that have stayed as invalid for over X days.</p>	<p>Time recording system is in place yes/no</p>		<p>4.2</p>
<p>internal / process</p>	<p>make decisions on time</p>	<p>decisions are made on time (without EOT?)</p>	<p>average time to determine in days, % of applications determined in 8/13 weeks (without EOT?)</p>	<p>Begin Short Interval Management of caseload - the work of which is likely to include introducing shorter, template reports, template conditions, and getting more timely advice from consultees</p>			<p>2.3, 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6</p>
<p>internal / process</p>	<p>make current IT fit-for-purpose</p>	<p>IT enables efficient processes - frequent tasks are quicker to perform. The team own the system, basic changes can be handled from within the service and 'bodes' or extra functionality options can be understood better or changed.</p>	<p>average time to do frequent tasks in minutes/hours, officer hours wasted on downtime</p>	<p>set up time recording system and produce a business case for the time/money that would be saved/generated if IT turned on the functionality that's available in the current version of Uniform (with consultee module switched on, template reports and conditions, and anything else that the current system can be used for that will enable efficiency savings). Make someone responsible for updating conditions once they are in Uniform.</p>	<p>Percentage of decisions that are made using a template report. Number of consultees that have had to be manually contacted per month. Number of conditions used from Uniform per month.</p>		<p>4.2 and 4.5</p>
<p>learning and growth</p>	<p>communicate clear individual and collective performance metrics</p>	<p>staff that are motivated to achieve individual and common goals, progress is made towards achieving targets</p>	<p>% of staff that feel motivated</p>	<p>draw together the outcome and activity measures from this service plan into a performance dashboard. Create a new process for monitoring and managing individual and collective performance.</p>	<p>Number of staff questionnaires responded to. Performance dashboards is in place yes/no.</p>		<p>5.1 and 5.3</p>

learning and growth	get workloads to manageable levels	staff report that their workloads are manageable, Workview shows a workload for the service of around 135 applications in the process of being determined and less than 20 applications in the process of being validated (not including invalid ones that are waiting for information from the applicant), percentage of EOT is reduced	% of staff that feel their workload is manageable, WIP measures in numbers of applications in Workview, percentage of applications that have had an EOT	introduce Short Interval Management of caseload (see row 8 above)	Number of issues logged and number of issues fixed on the issue log per month.		2.3, 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6
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Activity ref number	Activity	Lead person	Comments	Planned start	Planned length	Actual start	Actual length	% complete	Gantt Chart																																																	
									31-Mar-25	07-Apr-25	14-Apr-25	21-Apr-25	28-Apr-25	05-May-25	12-May-25	19-May-25	26-May-25	02-Jun-25	09-Jun-25	16-Jun-25	23-Jun-25	30-Jun-25	07-Jul-25	14-Jul-25	21-Jul-25	28-Jul-25	04-Aug-25	11-Aug-25	18-Aug-25	25-Aug-25	01-Sep-25	08-Sep-25	15-Sep-25	22-Sep-25	29-Sep-25	06-Oct-25	13-Oct-25	20-Oct-25	27-Oct-25	03-Nov-25	10-Nov-25	17-Nov-25	24-Nov-25	01-Dec-25	08-Dec-25	15-Dec-25	22-Dec-25	29-Dec-25	05-Jan-26	12-Jan-26	19-Jan-26	26-Jan-26	02-Feb-26	09-Feb-26	16-Feb-26	23-Feb-26	02-Mar-26	
1	<b>set up, monitor and manage the project</b>																																																									
1.1	draft project initiation document (PID), hold kickoff meeting to agree the PID & project plan			1	1	1	1	100%																																																		
1.2	write progress highlight report and hold project progress meetings			2	21																																																					
1.3	hold project board meeting 1			4	1																																																					
1.4	hold project board meeting 2			14	1																																																					
1.5	hold project board meeting 3			20	1																																																					
1.6	close down project			22	1																																																					
2	<b>reduce WIP to 5 weeks' worth of work - create capacity for preapps and PPAs</b>																																																									
2.1	draft and agree a communications strategy with some contents about this improvement project for stakeholders and customers		with Vviii from Comms and the Corporate Support	2	1																																																					
2.2	agree senior leadership and Cabinet approval of this project plan and the communications strategy			1	3	1		50%																																																		
2.3	introduce individual work plans & draft process note			4	1																																																					
2.4	manage caseload with short interval management approach		Lucy will model first week of SIM meetings, to start no earlier than week 6 due to Mondrem availability and elections	6	8																																																					
2.5	monitor issue log & create sub-projects to fix issues (record those sub-projects on this project plan)			7	8																																																					
2.6	measure impact on productivity (with Workview) and continue with, adapt or close down Short Interval Management approach as needed			15	1																																																					
3	<b>create a new pre-app approach</b>																																																									
3.1	design a new approach to delivering preapplication advice, in collaboration with stakeholders and statutory consultees			3	4																																																					
3.2	agree short/medium prioritisation for pre-application advice (will sometimes cause older applications to go out of time unless additional capacity is brought in - this additional capacity will partly come from activity 2, but that will not happen quickly enough to cover the new work from preapplication advice requests)			3	4																																																					
3.3	draft and agree a customer charter that includes SLAs in line with agreed prioritisation			5	3																																																					
4	<b>from the issue fix log (action 2.5), list which processes and sub-processes must be investigated</b>																																																									
4.1	from the issue fix log (action 2.5), list which processes and sub-processes must be investigated			14	1																																																					
4.2	<b>hold working sessions with stakeholders to create 'as is' value stream process map for key processes, and sub-processes.</b> Could include: end-to-end customer journey mapping, validation process, assessment and report writing for various application types (including things like template reports, template conditions), planning performance agreement sales and delivery, and discharging conditions			16	2																																																					
4.2a	End-to-end customer journey mapping			16	2																																																					
4.2b	Validation process			16	2																																																					
4.2c	Assessment for various application types			16	2																																																					
4.2d	Report writing for various application types			16	2																																																					
4.2e	Condition templates			16	2																																																					
4.2f	Planning performance agreement sales and delivery			16	2																																																					
4.2g	Discharging conditions			16	2																																																					
4.2h	Business case for cabinate for invalid/returned applications			16	2																																																					
4.2i	Refine decision/ letter templates fit for purpose. Minimal manual intervention required			16	2																																																					
4.3	identify areas for improvement following LEAN process improvement methodology			18	2																																																					
4.4	implement 'to be' processes and identify further efficiency savings that could be delivered by digital transformation or IT support to use existing software in a better way			20	2																																																					
5	<b>performance management</b>																																																									
5.1	create a performance dashboard based on the things that planners, customers and stakeholders want (staff wellbeing / retention, customer satisfaction, a speed measure, a quality measures)			14	1																																																					
5.2	draft a customer satisfaction survey and send with every decision notice		Mondrem examples	15	2																																																					
5.3	draft a staff satisfaction/wellbeing survey, send regularly and set up a working group to analyse the responses and take appropriate action		Mondrem examples	15	2																																																					
5.4	find source data for anything else on the performance dashboard or create it if none exists, and begin the trial.			17	6																																																					
5.5	assess if the trial is successful and either change it or communicate what the metrics will be, and source data, to staff and stakeholders.			23	1																																																					

## Project Charter

Project name	Planning Improvement Plan		
Created by	Vicki Baggaley, John Holmes	Date	26/03/25
Phone	01785 619327	Email	<a href="mailto:vbaggaley@staffordbc.gov.uk">vbaggaley@staffordbc.gov.uk</a> <a href="mailto:jholmes@staffordbc.gov.uk">jholmes@staffordbc.gov.uk</a>
Version number	I		

Root cause	<p>The planning team in Development Management (DM) have sustained high workloads for case officers and validation officers which has led to backlogs, slower processing times and lower productivity (decisions per person, per day). This backlog was caused initially by covid and then vacant posts within the case officer teams. The volume of applications received (work in) during that time also increased and the associated delays in determining applications has led to failure demand - frustrations from agents/applicants and lack of confidence from elected members.</p> <p>DM and Forward Planning (planning policy) have also been working in silo which has lengthened processing time for a small number of applications and made each department's work less reliable/robust.</p>
Purpose or goal	To reduce workloads to manageable levels (5 weeks WVIP), reintroduce the chargeable pre-app service to lock in higher productivity and higher income, and improve customer, stakeholder and staff satisfaction.
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To improve staff wellbeing</li> <li>▪ To improve customer experience</li> <li>▪ To improve reputation</li> <li>▪ To increase income - chargeable pre app service/ validation admin fee</li> <li>▪ To improve efficiency</li> <li>▪ To improve productivity</li> <li>▪ To improve performance, especially drawing together forward planning and DM to make more reliable policies and decisions</li> <li>▪ To reduce reliance on Extension of Time (EOTs)</li> </ul>
Outcomes or benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Better staff wellbeing</li> <li>▪ Better customer experience</li> <li>▪ Better reputation</li> <li>▪ New income</li> <li>▪ Higher efficiency</li> <li>▪ Higher productivity</li> <li>▪ Better performance</li> <li>▪ Reduction in EOTs</li> </ul>



Deliverables or outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A recorded proven methodology to reduce workloads/backlogs</li> <li>▪ A new operational management process</li> <li>▪ Performance reports</li> <li>▪ A log of issues that depress productivity and the agreed actions to fix those issues</li> <li>▪ Financial/budget reports forecasting pre-app income</li> <li>▪ Staff and Customer survey results</li> </ul>	
Timescales	<p>Start date: 1-April-25 End date: 31-Oct-25</p>	
Project performance measures	Starting performance	Target performance
	<p>On hand 476 applications</p> <p>2.5 week backlog for householder validation and 5 week backlog validation for other applications</p> <p>3 pre-apps in progress</p> <p>Staff morale not measured</p> <p>Customer satisfaction not measured</p>	<p>On hand 135 applications</p> <p>All applications validated within 2 days</p> <p>More than 50% of applications have had pre-application advice</p> <p>Measured and improving staff morale</p> <p>Measured and improving customer satisfaction</p>
Roles and responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Director: Gregg Stott</li> <li>▪ Sponsor: Dean Piper</li> <li>▪ Project lead: John Holmes</li> <li>▪ Project co-ordinator/administrator Vicki Baggaley</li> <li>▪ Subject matter experts: Sian Wright, Richard Wood and Alex Yendole</li> </ul>	
Communication	<p>The project will prioritise a communications plan early on in the work to give regular, formal feedback of progress.</p>	
Risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ If the resources needed for this project are spent on servicing failure demand, then the work to make changes will not progress.</li> <li>▪ If new pre-application requests are not prioritised over in-progress applications then customers will not purchase them and the new income and higher productivity will not be delivered.</li> </ul>	
Documentation	<p>Highlight reports weekly to the project sponsor, including a snapshot of customer satisfaction, staff morale and Workview charts.</p> <p>Board reports at the beginning, middle and end of the project including snapshots of the project plan and all project performance measures.</p>	



<p>Connections and dependencies</p>	<p>Dependant on the Planning policy team, senior leadership team and IT making resources available.</p>
<p>Scope</p>	<p>The project will include the work of the DM team including the planning enforcement team and the collective work of the DM and Planning Policy teams.</p>
<p>Decision making process</p>	<p>Decisions regarding the resources required by the DM team will be made by the DM Manager.</p> <p>Decisions regarding the resources required by the Planning Policy team will be made by the Planning Policy Manager.</p> <p>Decisions regarding the Senior Leadership team will be made by the Project Director (escalated to the Chief Executive where required).</p> <p>Any arbitration decisions will be made by the Project Director or Project Sponsor as required.</p>





## Agenda Item 7(b)

# New Local Plan 2025 - 2045

<b>Committee:</b>	Economic Development and Planning
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	10 June 2025
<b>Report of:</b>	Head of Economic Development and Planning
<b>Portfolio:</b>	Economic Development and Planning

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## 1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update the Committee on the new Local Plan 2025 - 2045 and associated documentation including new requirements and implications of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) December 2024, the latest evidence based information and the Local Development Scheme.

## 2 Recommendation

- 2.1 That the report is noted.

## 3 Key Issues and Reason for Recommendation

- 3.1 It is important for the Borough Council to make progress on the New Local Plan for Stafford Borough 2025-2045 in order to provide for future development across the Borough through establishing strategic planning policies and specific land allocations.
- 3.2 Since the current Plan for Stafford Borough 2011-2031 was adopted (Part 1 in June 2014 and Part 2 in January 2017) significant changes have occurred locally and nationally impacting upon planning policy. Corporately there continues to be a focus on delivering economic growth, and national policy seeks to ensure that development proposals take into account the effects of change on the built and natural environment.

- 3.3 On 6 March 2025 Cabinet approved to stop work on the Local Plan 2020-2040 and begin the process of advanced work prior to the official start of a new plan covering a plan period 2025-2045, through the Government's proposed new plan-making process. The Government, both previous and existing, have announced significant changes through National planning policy. These changes have impacted on Local Plans and plan-making, most recently by introducing a new plan-making process, as well as amending some of the current requirements for Local Plans. Further details are anticipated in the Summer 2025.
- 3.4 Prior to March 2025 it should be noted that the Local Plan 2020-2040 had completed the Preferred Options stage in October to December 2022 with a review and assessment of responses received. This highlighted several factors that had implications for that Plan, in particular the requirement to source further work to create a sound evidence base for the plan, as well as concern regarding the provision of additional dwellings for unmet need from neighbouring authorities as part of the future Stafford Borough development strategy.

## **4 Relationship to Stafford Borough Council's Corporate Plan**

- 4.1 The New Local Plan will help deliver the Council's Corporate Plan 2025/26 to 2027/28 through the following vision and 4 interlinking priorities:

### Vision

*"To be an effective Council that promotes a growing economy, strong, healthy communities and a sustainable environment."*

### Priorities

*"Prosperous Economy"*

*"Communities and Wellbeing"*

*"Climate Change, Nature Recovery and the Environment"*

*"Effective Council"*

## **5 Report Detail**

- 5.1 The production of a Local Plan is a requirement of the Town and Country Planning Acts.

5.2 The New Local Plan 2025-2045 will provide clear guidance to developers, and members of the public, through planning policies and proposals across the Borough. This will enable any resident or business to see the requirements related to future development.

5.3 The development of the Local Plan is identified as a corporate priority project.

### **New Local Plan process**

5.4 The adopted Plan for Stafford Borough (June 2014 and Part 2 in January 2017) covers the period 2011-2031. Councils must review their Local Plans at least once every five years from the adoption date to ensure that policies remain relevant and effectively address the needs of the local community. Previously the Council had progressed work on a new Local Plan 2020-2040, which began in July 2017 and completed a number of public consultation stages. The Local Plan 2025-2045 will now be progressed, as highlighted by the Cabinet decision on 6 March 2025 and the Key Issues section above.

5.5 The plan-making process consists of several key stages. Councils must set out target dates for meeting them in a Local Development Scheme (LDS). Stafford Borough's LDS was most recently published on 19 March 2025, please see web-link below:

[Local Development Scheme | Stafford Borough Council](#)

5.6 Before a new Local Plan can be adopted, it must go through an examination process administered by the Planning Inspectorate National Service (PINS). The examination will assess whether the new Local Plan has been prepared in accordance with legal and procedural requirements, and if the document is sound. As set out in paragraph 36 of the NPPF, the new Local Plan must therefore be:

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

- Consistent with national policy - enabling the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in this Framework and other statements of national planning policy, where relevant.

5.7 The plan-making process for Stafford Borough will continue to progress but needs to take into account national planning system changes, as detailed in the following paragraphs, to ensure any future plan will be sound when it comes forward for examination.

### **National Changes**

#### **Levelling up and Regeneration Act**

5.8 Between December 2022 and March 2023 a consultation was held on the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: reforms to national planning policy. It was within this consultation that the proposal of a new plan making system was put forward. The Bill became an Act in October 2023.

5.9 The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 states that a new 30-month plan making process will be implemented. Precise detail on what the new plan system from the Government will involve is still awaited and anticipated in Summer 2025, but the new system will have:

- 30-month timeframe to complete a new plan from start to adoption
- Upfront engagement with local communities and stakeholders
- Gateway Assessments: first and second Gateway Assessments are advisory. third Gateway Assessment will have a binding role as to whether the planning authority can submit their draft plan.

5.10 Further detail on plan making is set out within Section 3 of the NPPF, published in December 2024, and ANNEX 1: Implementation. It states that for the purpose of plan-making, policies in this version of the NPPF will apply from 12 March 2025, although being a material consideration in dealing with planning applications from the day of its publication.

#### **National Planning Policy Framework**

5.11 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was updated on 12 December 2024. There have been several significant changes through the NPPF, which will have implications on how a local plan is developed, as well as the currently adopted Plan for Stafford Borough 2011-2031 through the planning application decision-making process. In particular the Government has now introduced new mandatory housing targets and evidence based requirements.

- 5.12 The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 abolishes the principle of the Duty to Cooperate which requires Local Planning Authorities to co-operate with each other through the plan making system. However, the Duty remains a policy requirement under NPPF paragraph 24. This requirement is to be strengthened by the proposal of new mechanisms for cross-boundary strategic planning as required to deliver growth.

### **English Devolution White Paper**

- 5.13 In addition, on 16 December 2024 the Government published the English Devolution White Paper which set out a new framework of strategic and unitary authorities, with the Government's ambition that all areas will ultimately have a Mayoral Strategic Authority. Councils in all 21 two-tier areas, including Staffordshire, will be expected to reorganise over this Parliament and the next. Reorganisation is not a requirement for devolution, but the Government has indicated it will prioritise areas where reorganisation can unlock devolution.
- 5.14 The Government has set a clear expectation that new strategic authorities should be based on a population size of at least 1,500,000 people, whilst unitary councils should contain at least 500,000 people, although it has indicated that there is scope for some flexibility based on area circumstances. Further details are expected in the Summer / Autumn 2025 when the English Devolution Bill begins its passage through Parliament prior to being enacted.
- 5.15 All areas, regardless of whether they have a Strategic Authority in place, will have to produce a Spatial Development Strategy (SDS). An SDS is a statutory land-use planning document. It will set out an investment framework for building and development across a Strategic Authority's area.
- 5.16 Further details on strategic planning bodies are available through section 3.5 of the 'Powers, functions and funding - Devolution Framework' of the [English Devolution White Paper](#), whilst the "[Planning Positively For the Future](#)" document provides the latest information on the new system of Strategic Planning, published on 16 May 2025 by a national Strategic Planning Group co-ordinated by the consultants Prior + Partners.

- 5.17 Strategic planning will play a vital role in delivering sustainable growth and addressing key spatial issues – including meeting housing needs, delivering strategic infrastructure, growing the economy, and improving climate resilience. Strategic planning will also be important in the delivery of Local Growth Plans and Local Nature Recovery Strategies. It is the Government’s intention to move to a model of universal strategic planning covering functional economic areas within the next five years, with further details expected in the coming months as the Planning and Infrastructure Bill progresses through to being enacted, anticipated to be later this year. Nevertheless this will affect the local plan making system and therefore needs to be considered when further detail is available.

### **Planning and Infrastructure Bill**

- 5.18 The Government’s Planning and Infrastructure Bill (PIB) was laid before Parliament on 11 March 2025 and has begun its passage through the House of Commons before moving to the House of Lords ahead of the Final Stages and Royal Assent, which is expected later this year.
- 5.19 The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) is the supporting Department for the Bill, with the following legislative summary:

*“A Bill to make provision about infrastructure; to make provision about town and country planning; to make provision for a scheme, administered by Natural England, for a nature restoration levy payable by developers; to make provision about development corporations; to make provision about the compulsory purchase of land; to make provision about environmental outcomes reports; and for connected purposes.”*

- 5.20 The Planning and Infrastructure Bill includes proposals that aim to provide for a faster consenting process for critical infrastructure, introduce a new scheme of delegation to modernise local planning committees and provide for the introduction of a strategic planning system for England.
- 5.21 It is important to note that the Planning and Infrastructure Act could have implications across a range of Council services including economic development and planning, health and wellbeing, leisure and operations. Once the Bill is enacted these implications will need to be considered in more detail. For further information about the Planning and Infrastructure Bill please refer to the Government’s web-pages below:

[Planning and Infrastructure Bill - Parliamentary Bills - UK Parliament](#)

[The Planning and Infrastructure Bill - GOV.UK](#)

## Mandatory Housing Targets

- 5.22 A key change within the NPPF that has a more immediate effect on local plan making and development is the introduction of mandatory housing targets and the methodology used to calculate this.
- 5.23 The previous standard methodology calculated Local Housing Need at 358 per year for Stafford Borough (please note that this figure does change year on year). Whilst the current NPPF does not require a 10% buffer, the Council has historically applied this approach to ensure flexibility and delivery of homes, therefore the local housing need was 394 new homes per year.
- 5.24 In the period of 2020-2024 on average 544 new homes per year were completed.
- 5.25 Paragraph 62 of the NPPF directs that strategic policies should be informed by local housing need assessment conducted using the Government's standard method. The new methodology results in a mandatory housing target **of 751 dwellings per year** (15,020 over the plan period 2025-2045) for Stafford Borough. When 10% delivery buffer is applied this results in a target **of 826 dwellings per year** (16,520 over the plan period).
- 5.26 The considerable uplift of local housing need will have an obvious impact on how Stafford Borough develops in the future and, as such, needs to be reflected in the new Local Plan. Furthermore the mandatory housing target has had a more immediate impact on the decision-making process for planning applications.
- 5.27 Paragraph 78 of the NPPF requires that local planning authorities (LPAs) have a 5-year land supply. It should also be noted that the target to be reached for housing supply will increase to six years supply from July 2026.
- 5.28 Until the NPPF was published in December 2024 Stafford Borough Council was in a strong position to resist planning applications for areas, or building increased housing numbers, that were not in line with the adopted Plan for Stafford Borough because the Council could demonstrate a five year land supply. However, when the new Local Housing Need figure is applied the Borough Council now has less than a five year supply of housing land. Based on the housing supply figures as at 31 March 2024 the Borough Council has a 3.65 year supply, with an updated position as at 31 March 2025 to be published imminently. As a result future planning decisions on planning applications must apply the adopted Plan for Stafford Borough 2011-2031 as well as the NPPF's presumption in favour of sustainable development. Therefore the settlement boundaries identified in the adopted Plan carry less weight in terms of new housing development outside of Green Belt areas.

Nevertheless it is important to note that Stafford Borough's adopted Plan policies, including the Borough's development strategy, will continue to be used for decision-taking in order to deliver sustainable development aligned to the latest published NPPF.

5.29 Paragraph 79 of the NPPF sets out the situation where a Local Planning Authority's delivery falls below the housing requirement over the previous three years. Where the Housing Delivery Test indicates that this is the case, the following policy consequences should apply:

- (a) where delivery falls below 95% of the requirement over the previous three years, the authority should prepare an action plan to assess the causes of under-delivery and identify actions to increase delivery in future years;
- (b) where delivery falls below 85% of the requirement over the previous three years, the authority should include a buffer of 20% to their identified supply of specific deliverable sites as set out in paragraph 78 of this framework, in addition to the requirement for an action plan.
- (c) where delivery falls below 75% of the requirement over the previous three years, the presumption in favour of sustainable development applies, as set out in footnote 8 of this Framework, in addition to the requirements for an action plan and 20% buffer.

### **Transitional Arrangements**

5.30 The transitional arrangements set out within the NPPF (ANNEX 1: Implementation) states that the policies set out within the NPPF will apply, for the purpose of preparing local plans from 12 March 2025, whilst being material considerations in dealing with planning applications from the publication date (12 December 2024). The Council have not submitted the plan for examination or reached Regulation 19. Additionally, our Local Housing Need figure has had an increase of over 200 dwellings per year. Due to this increase in housing figure, the Borough Council will, in the future, need to introduce new policies to support the increased housing figure. As a result of the latest changes through the NPPF (December 2024) and the scale of new evidence required it would not have been possible to meet the deadlines set by Government to progress through the existing plan-making process. Furthermore, plans being submitted and examined currently will be required to start a new Local Plan based on the new legislation immediately following adoption, in any event.



- 5.31 As mentioned within paragraph 5.9 a new 30-month plan system is anticipated to be put in place and whilst precise details are not yet available the Borough Council have set out the following timeline (Table 1), through the Local Development Scheme published in March 2025, of how this will apply to our local context. Please note that the Local Development Scheme will need to be updated once further details about the new plan-making system is published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in Summer 2025.

**Table 1: Local Development Scheme (March 2025)**

Scoping and early participation	September 2025
Notice period intention to start plan	May 2026
Gateway 1	September 2026
Plan visioning and strategy development	September 2026
Mandatory public consultation	October - November 2026
Evidence gathering and drafting the plan	October - December 2026
Gateway 2	December 2026
Mandatory public consultation	January - February 2027
Engagement, proposing changes, submission	April 2027
Gateway 3	May 2027
Examination	June - November 2027
Finalisation and adoption of digital plan	November / December 2027

## **Evidence base**

- 5.32 For any plan to be considered justified and sound it must be supported by a robust and up to date evidence base. Stafford Borough has a strong track record of preparing and adopting effective Local Plan that deliver for the local communities.
- 5.33 Working from a consistent evidence base through the Borough Council and with partners ensures that recommendations made in relation to the New Local Plan 2025-2045 policy-specific areas are consistent and complementary to an approach that supports equality in both service provision, climate change and health outcomes.
- 5.34 It should also be noted that the New Local Plan process sits alongside, and is used to support through its evidence base, a range of strategies that are being progressed by the Council to inform decisions, hence the added value of the Local Plan process.
- 5.35 An evidence base was established for the Local Plan 2020-2040. However due to the changes in the local housing requirement, key pieces of work i.e. Economic Housing and Delivery Needs Assessment, Whole Plan Viability Assessment, will have to be redone in their entirety for the new Local Plan 2025-2045 due to the national changes alongside additional studies also required, for example the Climate Change study. Whilst this work has begun, some of these studies will take at least twelve months to completed.
- 5.36 Appendix 1 lists the required documents to ensure a robust evidence base for the new Local Plan process is created.
- 5.37 In conclusion, it is the combination of the uplift in Local Housing Need with the required evidence base, and the imposed deadline for plans under the current system to be submitted that results in the need to begin early pre-scoping work on the new plan system, prior to officially starting a new plan.

## **6 Implications**

### **6.1 Financial**

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

The additional budget requirement of £508,310 over the budget period of 2024/25 to 2027/28 has been built into the proposed budgets approved by Cabinet on 30 January 2025 and Full Council on 11 February 2025.

The budget amounts per year for forecast spend are set out in the table below:

	<b>Budget £'000</b>
2024/25 (Actual Expenditure)	3
Budget 2025/26	478
Budget 2026/27	286
Budget 2027/28	119
<b>Total</b>	<b>886</b>

## 6.2 Legal

The New Local Plan has to be prepared in accordance with the relevant Planning Acts and regulations, and be aligned with related national planning policy and guidance. The Plan will need in accordance with the Council's constitution to be formally endorsed by Full Council prior to publication and on adoption.

## 6.3 Human Resources

The New Local Plan will be delivered by existing staff from within Economic Development and Planning, and the wider organisation, together with support from specialist consultants.

## 6.4 Risk Management

An adopted local plan for Stafford Borough is in place. However, there is a requirement on Local Planning Authorities to review Local Plans and ensure policies are up to date. for plans to be reviewed and kept up to date. A delay and / or uncertainty at the local level without a new Local Plan being produced could lead to legal challenges and/or planning appeals with potential significant costs for the Council.

Whilst the Council will seek to ensure that the New Local Plan is progressed in accordance with the latest timetable and minimise any risks of delay it should be noted that the following external factors are beyond the Council's control and may have an impact:

- Changes in Government legislation, regulations and policy

- Unanticipated scale and nature of consultation responses received including new evidence submitted unexpectedly
- Failure of key partners and other agencies to deliver evidence on time and make responses to key elements of the process
- Unanticipated delays in external events such as resource capacity of the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) for the Examination process or failure to deliver robust arrangements for this process

It should be noted that the following risks can be considered and effectively managed by the Council:

- Staff turnover, recruitment difficulties and sickness absences leading to inadequate skills base
- Political changes, procedural delays or failure to meet Council deadlines
- Non-conformity and failure in the tests of soundness for new planning policy documents

The Council will continue to closely monitor Government legislation, regulations and policy as part of updating the Local Plan whilst deploying robust programme management techniques to deliver evidence as required through the process, including regularly engaging with the Planning Inspectorate. All internal risks will be reviewed when required and proposed actions delivered efficiently.

## **6.5 Equalities and Diversity**

The New Local Plan 2025-2045 will provide clear guidance to developers, and also members of the public, through planning policies and proposals in across the Borough. This will enable any resident or business to see the requirements related to future development. There are no direct impacts identified for Age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation at this stage.

The New Local Plan will deliver a statutory development plan which is designed to be inclusive to all residents and those interested in planning the future for the Borough.

Throughout the process of preparing the New Local Plan a thorough consultation and engagement process will enable residents and interested parties to be involved in its preparation, including 24/7 access to key documents through the Borough Council's website.

## 6.6 Health

Working from a consistent evidence base through the Borough Council and with partners, ensures that recommendations made in relation to the New Local Plan 2025-2045 with policy-specific areas are consistent and complementary to an approach that supports equality in both service provision and health outcomes. Specific reference will be made when details of the New Local Plan 2025-2045 are made available.

## 6.7 Climate Change

Working from a consistent evidence base through the Borough Council and with partners, ensures that recommendations made in relation to the New Local Plan 2025-2045 with policy-specific areas are consistent and complementary to an approach that supports equality in both service provision and climate change outcomes. Specific reference will be made when details of the New Local Plan 2025-2045 are made available.

## 7 Appendices

Appendix 1: New Local Plan evidence base

## 8 Previous Consideration

11 January 2024 Economic Development and Planning Agenda and Minutes via link below:

[23/24 Committee Meetings | Stafford Borough Council](#)

## 9 Background Papers

File available in Economic Development and Planning together with the following information available via the Stafford Borough Council website link:

[Local Development Scheme | Stafford Borough Council](#)

**Contact Officer:** Alex Yendole

**Telephone Number:** 07800 619530

**Ward Interest:**

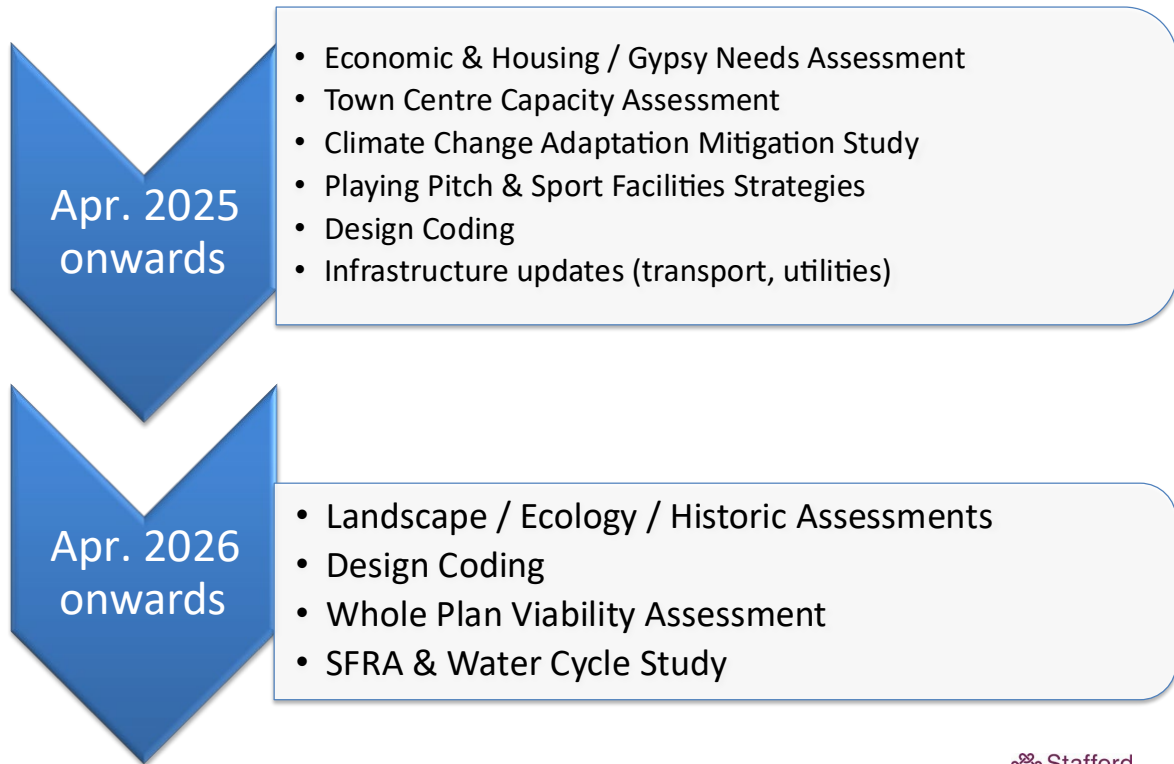
**Report Track:** Economic Development and Planning - 10 June 2025 (Only)

**Key Decision:**

# Appendix 1

## Local Plan Evidence Base

### Delivering the Evidence Base



## Agenda Item 7(c)

# UK Shared Prosperity Fund Programme 2022-25

<b>Committee:</b>	Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	10 June 2025
<b>Report of:</b>	Head of Economic Development and Planning
<b>Portfolio:</b>	Economic Development and Planning

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## 1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update Members on the completed delivery of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) Programme for 2022-2025.

## 2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That Members note the report.

## 3 Key Issues

- 3.1 The UKSPF programme ran until 31 March 2025, however a further 12 month allocation has been launched for the financial year 2025/6.

## 4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 The UKSPF programme supports delivery of Priorities 1, 2 and 3 of the Council's Corporate Plan 2025/6 to 2027/8 by developing the local economy, supporting local communities and supporting climate change action.

## 5 Report Detail

- 5.1 In December 2022 the Council was allocated £4,673,295 to deliver the projects contained within the Stafford Borough UKSPF Investment Plan. Due to the geography of the Borough the Council was also allocated a further £487,936 under the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) in recognition of the additional challenges faced by rural communities.

5.2 The UKSPF programme required that investment in local priorities and needs be focussed across three key themes. For Stafford the applicable themes were Community and Place and Supporting Local Businesses. For each investment made the Council were required to monitor outputs and outcomes to ensure eligibility for UKSPF.

5.3 Under the Community and Place theme nine projects were delivered as follows:

- i) Eccleshall Tennis Club a not-for-profit amateur sports club, run by a committee of member volunteers, gained support to install an artificial grass court.
- ii) Stone Leisure Centre Solar Panels investment enabled the installation of 500 square metres of low carbon infrastructure.
- iii) The Crown Wharf Theatre in Stone benefited from investment that enabled the fit-out for the new theatre including a heating & ventilation system, lighting, and other equipment.
- iv) Stafford Regeneration Project supported the acquisition of the former Co-Op building as part of the wider Stafford Town Centre Transformation Programme.
- v) Stafford Town Lighting saw the installation of new festive lighting to make the town more appealing to the public during the Christmas period.
- vi) Staffordshire History Centre contributed to the County Council's new visitor space and storage for important historic collections based in Eastgate Street, Stafford.
- vii) Stone Scout Hut received support to undertake renovations to make the facility useable.
- viii) Westbridge Park Car Park Project saw the laying out of car parks specifically for the Canoe Club and Scouts. As a result, 2800 square metres of public space was improved and formed part of a wider project enabling visitors to access the local amenities and wildlife.
- ix) Visitor Promotion Campaign Our Beautiful Borough raised the profile of the borough to residents, businesses and visitors reaching over 1,801,000 people in a 12-month period.

5.4 Under the theme of Supporting Local Businesses a further six initiatives were completed as follows:



- i) **The Business Support Programme** provided a series of business workshops and events as well as a dedicated Growth Hub Adviser. Workshops were delivered through the Ignite and Thrive Programme, Going for Growth, in addition to High Street Boost which in total supported 125 businesses.
- ii) **Green Solutions** offered businesses an energy efficiency review, access to carbon literacy training and a grant scheme. As a result of the green solutions grant, nine businesses have adopted recent technologies.
- iii) **High Street Boost Grants** developed for High Street businesses based in Stafford, Stone, and Eccleshall town centres. Twenty businesses were supported with the grant. This grant scheme was developed to address a need identified through the High Street Boost project that was delivered by Good 2 Great.
- iv) **Rural Business to Business (B2B) and Business Innovation Grants.** saw 52 businesses adopting a range of new or improved products or services.
- v) **Rural Workspace feasibility** saw a study undertaken to ascertain the feasibility for a rural workspace hub.
- vi) **Institute of Technology (IoT)** The Council supported Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group with investment in the development of the IoT due to open in the Autumn.

5.5 Under the REPF Community strand of funding the Council provided investment to four community organisations which in turn provided support as follows:

- i) **Forton Cricket Club** redeveloped their club house to make it more family friendly.
- ii) **The Stone Heritage Centre** used the funds to fit out the new facility which occupies the town's former fire station. The investment funded a number of items including display cases and furniture as well as IT and CCTV equipment.
- iii) **Ranton Village Hall** used investment to replace the entire floor which was no longer fit for purpose.
- iv) **Broughton Parish Rooms** replaced some of their wooden windows with new double-glazed windows to conserve energy, reduce costs and keep users of the rooms warm and comfortable.

- 5.6 The communities in receipt of this funding provided match funding totalling just under £51,000.
- 5.7 Finally, under the REPF Business strand of funding the Council supported eight rural businesses with projects ranging from EV charging points to solar panels to kitchen equipment. Again, those businesses provided a total match funding amount just over £71,000.
- 5.8 The UKSPF programme has enabled the Council to work with partners and communities to target investment to priority projects and needs. Members can see from the investments set out above that the scale and range of support provided has been significant. As such officers are preparing a review of the programme, including case studies to capture the longer term impacts that the investments have made.
- 5.9 Whilst the 2022-25 programme ended with effect from 31 March 2025 a further 12 month UKSPF allocation was awarded for the financial year 2025/6. As such an initial proposal for investment was required by government by 8 May 2025. Officers have therefore been focussed on working with partners to identify projects for delivery by 31 March 2026 and will provide an update to Members at a future meeting.

## **6 Implications**

### **6.1 Financial**

N/A

### **6.2 Legal**

N/A

### **6.3 Human Resources**

N/A

### **6.4 Risk Management**

N/A

### **6.5 Equalities and Diversity**

N/A

### **6.6 Health**

N/A

**6.7 Climate Change**

N/A

**7 Appendices**

None

**8 Previous Consideration**

Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny Committee 19 November 2024

**9 Background Papers**

None

**Contact Officer:** Michelle Smith

**Telephone Number:** 01785 619 335

**Ward Interest:** All

**Report Track:** Economic Development and Planning 10 June 2025  
(Only)

**Key Decision:** No

**Agenda Item 7(d)**

# **Work Programme - Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny Committee**

**Committee:** Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny  
**Date of Meeting:** 10 June 2025  
**Report of:** Head of Law and Governance  
**Portfolio:** Economic Development and Planning Portfolio

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## **1 Purpose of Report**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to present the Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme

## **2 Recommendation**

2.1 That the report be noted.

## **3 Key Issues**

3.1 The first stage in achieving a Member-led Overview and Scrutiny process is to develop a Work Programme for the Members of the Committee to own.

3.2 Accordingly, an up-to-date copy of the Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme is provided for Members to consider or amend as appropriate.

## **4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities**

4.1 This report is most closely associated with the following Corporate Business Objective 1:-

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

## 5 Report Detail

- 5.1 Members will recall that one of the fundamental philosophies behind the creation of Overview and Scrutiny is that the process should be Member-led and the first stage in achieving this is to develop a Work Programme that is:-
- Owned by all Members of the Scrutiny Committee
  - Flexible to allow the Committee to react to urgent items
  - Contain aspects of both Overview and Scrutiny
- 5.2 Therefore, at each scheduled meeting of the Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny Committee, an up-to-date copy of the Work Programme will be provided for Members to consider or amend as appropriate.
- 5.3 The Work Programme includes provision for the Committee to scrutinise appropriate items delivered through the Council's Service Delivery Plan up to twelve months in advance, whilst maintaining the flexibility to respond to any issues that may arise.
- 5.4 Accordingly, attached at **APPENDIX** is the Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny Committee's current Work Programme to consider or amend as appropriate.

## 6 Implications

### 6.1 Financial

None

### 6.2 Legal

None

### 6.3 Human Resources

None

### 6.4 Risk Management

None

### 6.5 Equalities and Diversity

The Borough Council considers the effect of its actions on all sections and has addressed all of the following Equality Strands in the production of this report, as appropriate:-

Age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

**6.6 Health**

None

**6.7 Climate Change**

None

**7 Appendices**

Appendix: Work Programme

**8 Previous Consideration**

None

**9 Background Papers**

File available in Law and Governance

**Contact Officer:** Jackie Allen

**Telephone Number:** 01785 619552

**Ward Interest:** Nil

**Report Track:** Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny  
Committee - 10 June 2025 (Only)

**Key Decision:** N/A

## **Work Programme - Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny Committee**

### **Future Items:**

Tourism / Visitor Economy - Charlotte Cain - July

Protecting Our Rivers and Oceans Motion (Local Plan) - July

Business Planning Report - July

Masterplan, including Parking Strategy - joint with Community Wellbeing

Historic Buildings in Town Centres - Policy regarding Historic Importance

Cumulative Impact Assessment Report (Chief Inspector Giles Parsons)