



Councillor Andy Cooper (Deputy Mayor)

Present (for all or part of the meeting):-

Councillors:

K M Aspin
F Beatty
R P Cooke
B M Cross
M G Dodson
A P Edgeller
P C Edgeller
A T A Godfrey
A D Hobbs
J Hood
F D J James
R A James
E G R Jones
P W Jones
R Kenney
P A Leason

A M Loughran
B McKeown
A R McNaughton
D M McNaughton
A Nixon
L Nixon
G P K Pardesi
A N Pearce
J M Pert
A F Reid
J T Rose
A J Sandiford
S N Spencer
J Thorley
M J Winnington

Officers in attendance:-

T Clegg	-	Chief Executive
I Curran	-	Head of Law and Governance
J Allen	-	Democratic Services Officer

C14 Minutes

The Minutes of the previous meeting held on 19 May 2025 were agreed as a true and correct record.

C15 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Barron, E L Carter, I D Fordham, J Nixon, M Phillips, J S Powell, J P Read and D P Rouxel

C16 Announcements

The Deputy Mayor announced the passing of former Alderman Kenneth Stuart Williamson and invited Members to join him for a minute's silence, which was followed by Councillors M J Winnington, M J Pert and A T A Godfrey paying tribute to him.

Councillor A T A Godfrey provided an update regarding the Local Government Reorganisation. Work is ongoing to continue to achieve the best possible outcomes for the residents of Stafford Borough. Continuing, the Leader confirmed that the Stafford Town Council Working Group had been established and he would continue to keep Members fully informed. All stakeholders will be consulted within the coming months.

C17 Councillor Session

- (a) Councillor F Beatty had submitted the following question in accordance with Paragraph 12.3(a) of the Council Procedure Rules:-

“In the last two years, Conservatives have brought motions to this Council and asked questions of both the Cabinet Member and the Leader around the Local Plan on no less than six occasions, about:

- 1 The importance of maintaining our residential boundaries in order to restrict housing growth to areas identified by the authority’s long-term strategies. This is now dead in the water, with developers indiscriminately putting forward any land that they own.
- 2 A timeline to bring forward the Local Plan. It has taken eighteen months so far to answer this, whilst the Local Plan was worked on but then shelved, at huge cost to the taxpayers of the Borough.
- 3 We need to know where in the Borough, where in our villages, the administration is planning to sanction the preposterous and eye-watering annual house building regime imposed by central government. The Borough Council is working on a piecemeal basis with no adequate answers to the approaches from developers.

How does the Borough Council plan to stem the tide of opportunist developers?”

Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Planning, Councillor A F Reid responded as follows:

“The councillor acknowledges that she’s asked these questions before and she has. Cllr Beatty nevertheless makes some of the same inaccurate claims again and so let’s clarify things.

The Council has already and continues to take every opportunity to point out to the government the impact of their new planning framework and mandatory targets on our borough. We are handling a situation that was not of our making. We have yet to hear of any practical suggestions, however we can run through the impractical ones if so wished!

The adopted Plan for Stafford Borough 2011-2031 is and will continue to be used for making decisions on planning applications, although settlement boundaries now have less weight for new housing developments as a result of recent government decisions. The Council will now respond to approaches from developers putting forward land to ensure the adopted Plan continues to be delivered alongside the necessary infrastructure, services and facilities for our local communities.

Councillor Beatty asks for the timeline yet has repeatedly been shown the timeline for the New Local Plan. Any relevant evidence previously collected by the borough will be re-used, updated, and refreshed according to the new legal process. But the former administration did not collect the minimum now required to progress a Local Plan - Cllr Beatty has even argued against collecting more evidence, voted to halt collecting evidence, urged the Borough Council to progress her former plan despite a large volume of high-quality negative feedback to her own Preferred options and insufficient evidence. Half the former administration's front bench argued against aspects of her local plan, either verbally or in writing! Progressing the old plan was not practical.

Adequate budget is now in place to draw up a proper Local Plan and to return the proposed options for consultation with our communities. We are giving our communities another chance to have a say in their future, while Cllr Beatty has been pushing to continue her plan - Cllr Beatty would deny our communities any further right to influence changes. I disagree, and our process brings the Local Plan back to local communities to have a say.

The re-introduction of a pre-application service will help to shape developer applications in alignment with community needs. Developers who avail themselves of this service should then be able to submit applications that proceed faster through the application process, as they will already know what they need to do.

The best way to ensure that local residents have a say in the future of their communities and the borough as a whole is through our new Local Plan. We need it to have robust evidence, present realistic options, is consulted well, is progressed at pace, and meets the legal requirements.

Until then, I will continue to ensure that our Development Management Team have the necessary resources to be able to handle applications and will ensure they have access to the appropriate evidence to enforce our policies on applications. Anyone who is promoting a large-scale residential development urge to engage in a pre-application process, as this is a proven method of ensuring that good quality planning applications come forward that benefit their current and future communities."

Councillor F Beatty asked the following supplementary question:

“There will be unplanned speculative developments in unsustainable location which will be determined at appeal against the policies of the Council which will entirely upset the trust in the Council. This will be damaging to the Planning Department which already has limited resources. It is a shame that the current administration didn’t continue with the Local Plan when other authorities did so.”

Councillor A F Reid responded as follows:

“By re-starting the plan and upgrading the evidence this give the community more choice and control over the new settlements. The opposition repeatedly objected to go out to consultation. This administration is returning the choice to communities. In the meantime, the department has adequate funds to develop the Local Plan and we are correcting and changing the funding of the Planning Team as well. In terms of having control of the individual applications, there was an announcement in parliament today that it is possible to consider multiple applications in the planning process. Councillor Reid has asked for clarification on this.”

Councillor A P Edgeller asked how many large scale developments are coming as developers are taking advantage of us not having a Local Plan.

Councillor Reid responded by saying that the Council has a current adopted Local Plan which continues to be enforced that works alongside the NPPF. It enables us to control the spatial element of that plan. It will carry less weight than it used to but it is in place. In terms of the number of applications, there are a number of applications which can be viewed on the portal but he could not discuss individual applications. In terms of other potential sites we will look at them as they come forward.

Councillor J M Pert asked what is the strategic response to assist the mass development of rural areas. The local plan is out of date and the 5 year land supply has not been met.

Councillor A F Reid responded by saying that no-one is in favour of over-development. Today’s announcement at Westminster is interesting and we don’t have to look at applications in isolation. Unsustainable development is against the NPPF therefore there is legal protection against this.

Councillor R Kenney queried the preferred options stage.

Councillor Reid responded that the crux of the preferred options was Meecebrook and the crux of that was HS2. Things have changed since then. This has created a very fragile and easy to challenge set of preferred options. There wasn’t time to progress under the new

framework. There was insufficient evidence under the new evidence regulations to progress. We have to re-start the local plan and begin the process of gathering evidence and go out to consultation.

The Head of Law and Governance informed Members that the 10 minute time limit for consideration of such items as provided for under 12.6 of the Council Procedure Rules had been reached, and that the matter not be considered further.

C18 Annual Scrutiny Business Report

Included within the agenda was the report of the Head of Law and Governance which provided details of the scrutiny activity that had been undertaken over the last municipal year.

Councillor A P Edgeller proposed and Councillor F Beatty seconded that the report be noted.

Councillor A P Edgeller, Chair of Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee, thanked members of the Scrutiny Committee for their commitment this year and extended thanks to the Officers who have provided help and guidance. Councillor Edgeller stated that the agenda for the ensuing year is full.

Councillor M J Winnington, Chair of Resources Scrutiny Committee thanked Officers for their time and effort and also to Members for their attendance and contribution over the year. He concluded by saying that he hoped there would be a measured response regarding the Local Government Reorganisation for the stability of staff.

Councillor F Beatty, Chair of the Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny Committee, echoed the comments of Councillors Edgeller and Winnington and asked for feedback from the Scrutiny Committee's recommendations to Cabinet.

RESOLVED:- that the report be noted.

C19 Recommendations Referred from Cabinet

Council was requested to consider the following recommendations from the Cabinet meeting held on 7 July 2025 in respect of the following matters:

- (i) Stafford Town Centre Regeneration Capital Programme Change - Confidential - Minute No CAB12/25

“That:-

- (a) it be recommended to Council that the capital programme be updated to include £332,000 in respect of the leasehold acquisition of the site as identified on the plan in appendix 1 of the confidential report, funded by the Council's reserves;

- (b) a revenue budget be established from reserves to support the associated activities £88,000 as identified in paragraph 5.15 of the confidential report;
- (c) authority be delegated to the Head of Economic Development and Planning (in consultation with the Deputy Leader, the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Planning and the Council Section 151 Officer) to take all necessary steps to complete the acquisition set out in minutes (a) and (b) above;
- (d) authority be delegated to the Head of Economic Development and Planning (in consultation with the Deputy Leader, the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Planning, the Council Section 151 Officer and the Stafford Town Centre Transformation Programme Board) to progress the delivery plan of the acquired site. This will include appointment of external contractors, preparation and submission of regulatory approval applications, conducting relevant surveys and entering into any necessary license agreements to deliver the programme as a whole”.

Councillor R Kenney proposed and Councillor F D J James seconded that the recommendations of Cabinet be approved.

Councillor J M Pert asked Councillor R Kenney to confirm that there are the right level of skills and seniority to deal with the number of large projects and for a commitment to producing a Masterplan.

Councillor Kenney confirmed that the skills are in place amongst Officers and external sources. Councillor Kenney would provide a written response to the masterplan query.

At the vote this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED:- that the recommendations of Cabinet on 7 July 2025, as detailed above, be approved

- (ii) Land Acquisition - Stafford Station Gateway - Confidential - Minute No CAB13/25

“That:-

- (a) the update provided in relation to the LUF allocation be noted;
- (b) it be recommend to Council that the capital programme be amended to reflect an overall cost of £3.735m to complete the acquisition of the land identified within the red line boundary set out within confidential appendix 1 of the report, subject to the conditions as set out in paragraph 5.20;

- (c) authority be delegated to the Head of Economic Development and Planning (in consultation with the Deputy Leader, the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Planning and the Council Section 151 Officer) to take all necessary steps to complete the acquisition of the site;
- (d) a revenue budget of £90,000 be established to support the associated activities as identified in paragraph 5.21 of the report”.

Councillor A F Reid proposed and Councillor S N Spencer seconded that the recommendations of Cabinet be approved.

At the vote this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED:- that the recommendations of Cabinet on 7 July 2025, as detailed above, be approved

MAYOR