

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

New Local Plan 2025 - 2045

Sustainability Appraisal Scoping
Report Consultation - 2026



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1. Non-technical summary

This non-technical summary introduces the Development Plan, Sustainability Appraisal including Strategic Environmental Assessment, and highlights the main outcomes of the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report.

The purpose of this Scoping Report is to provide the context for, and determine the scope of, the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of the Stafford Borough New Local Plan 2025-2045, and to set out the framework for assessing the sustainability of the new Development Plan.

It will incorporate the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the new Local Plan. For the purposes of this report, we refer to the SA of the Stafford Borough New Local Plan, which should be taken as incorporating SEA.

SA is an assessment process designed to consider and report upon the significant sustainability issues and effects of emerging plans and policies, including their reasonable alternatives.

2. The Plan Area

Stafford Borough Council adopted the Plan for Stafford Borough 2011-2031 on the 19 June 2014. The adopted Local Plan sets out the Council's vision and strategy for Stafford Borough up to 2031. It sets out policies and allocates land for specific uses including housing, employment and retail development. It also sets out the criteria for determining planning applications and guides the decision-making process.

The Council is required to review the Local Plan within five years of its adoption. In July 2017 the Council carried out its Local Plan Review when a consultation on the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report took place. Subsequently the Local Plan 2020-2040 Issues and Options consultation took place in February to April 2020 followed by the Preferred Options (Regulation 18) consultation which occurred between October 2022 to December 2022. However, following the new requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in December 2024 Cabinet took the decision on 6 March 2025, to stop work on the Local Plan 2020-2040 and begin investigation of and to develop a new Local Plan 2025 to 2045 through the new plan-making process.

The new Local Plan 2025-2045 will replace the existing Local Plan documents. The Local Plan will be a borough-wide plan that will coordinate the development and growth requirements of the Borough over a period of 20 years. The Council is at an early stage in the development of the new Local Plan.

3. Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires Local Plans to be subject to an SA. The SA is designed to ensure that the plan preparation process maximises the contribution that a plan makes to sustainable development and minimises any potential adverse impacts. The SA process involves appraising the likely environmental, social and economic effects of the policies and proposals within a plan from the outset of its development.

The SEA is also a statutory assessment process, originally required under the European SEA Directive, transposed in the UK by the SEA Regulations and amended by the Environmental Assessments and Miscellaneous Planning (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018 (SI 2018/1232). No substantive changes were made by this instrument to the way the SEA regime currently operates. Therefore, the SEA Regulations remain in force, and it is a legal requirement for the Stafford Borough Local Plan to be subject to SA and SEA throughout its preparation.

Whilst the SEA and SA are separate processes both have similar aims and objectives. Simply put, SEA focuses on the likely environmental effects of a plan whilst SA focuses on the social and economic effects of a plan, in addition to the environment.

The Government's Planning Practice Guidance shows how it is possible to satisfy both requirements by undertaking a joint SA and SEA process, and to present an SA Report that incorporates the requirements of the SEA Regulations.

The SA process comprises of five stages, with scoping being Stage A as shown below:

- **Stage A:** Setting the context and objectives, establishing the baseline and deciding the scope.
- **Stage B:** Developing and refining options and assessing effects.
- **Stage C:** Preparing the Sustainability Appraisal Report
- **Stage D:** Consulting on the Local Plan and the SA Report.
- **Stage E:** Monitoring the significant effects of implementing the Local Plan.

Through the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023, the Government secured powers to bring forward a new domestic framework to replace the current Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) and SEA environmental assessment regimes.

Environmental Outcomes Reports (EORs) is a new environmental assessment method that is currently being developed and will replace SAs, SEAs and EIAs. Guidance issued to date states that until a new system is implemented, current legislation on environmental assessment and its supporting guidance continues to apply. Any changes to the legal framework for carrying out SA/SEA will be addressed appropriately as the Local Plan is prepared, and documented as required in either subsequent SA Reports or Environmental Outcomes Reports.

Approach to scoping

The main tasks associated with the scoping stage of the SA (Stage A) are as follows:

- **Stage A1:** Setting out the policy context for the SA of the Local Plan, i.e. key policies and strategies that influence what the Local Plan and the SA need to consider.
- **Stage A2:** Setting out the baseline for the SA of the Local Plan, i.e. the current and environmental, social, and economic conditions in Stafford Borough and their likely evolution in the absence of the new Local Plan.
- **Stage A3:** Drawing on A1 and A2, identify the sustainability problems and/or opportunities ('issues') that the Local Plan and SA should address.
- **Stage A4:** Drawing on A1, A2 and A3, develop a framework of SA objectives and assessment criteria against which to appraise the constituent parts of the Local Plan in isolation and in combination.
- **Stage A5:** Consulting on the intended scope and level of detail of the SA.

This Scoping Report sets out the intended scope and level of detail of the SA of the Local Plan for consultation with the relevant environmental authorities. It fulfils the requirements set out above and provides the foundations for appraisal of the likely effects of constituent parts of the Local Plan, as plan-making progresses. In accordance with the Government's Planning Practice Guidance on SA/SEA, the Scoping Report is proportionate and relevant to the Local Plan, focusing on what is needed to assess likely significant effects. It also takes account of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the emphasis it places on achieving sustainable development.

Structure of the Scoping Report

Table 1 below signposts the relevant sections of the Scoping Report that are considered to meet the SEA Regulations requirements (the remainder will be met during subsequent stages of the SA of the Stafford Borough Local Plan).

Table 1 Meeting the requirements of the SEA Regulations

SEA Regulations requirements	Covered in this Scoping Report?
Environmental report	
<p>Where an environmental assessment is required by any provision of Part 2 of these Regulations, the responsible authority shall prepare, or secure the preparation of, an environmental report in accordance with paragraphs (2) and (3) of this regulation. The report shall identify, describe and evaluate the likely significant effects on the environment of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • implementing the plan or programme; and • reasonable alternatives taking into account the objectives and geographical scope of the plan or programme. (Regulation 12(1) and (2) and Schedule 2). 	<p>The full SA Report produced to accompany the Stafford Borough New Local Plan 2025-2045 will constitute the 'environmental report' and will be produced at a later stage in the SA process.</p>
<p>An outline of the contents and main objectives of the plan or programme, and of its relationship with other relevant plans and programmes.</p>	<p>These requirements are addressed in relation to each topic covered in Chapters 4 to 6 of this SA Scoping Report and subsequent SA reports.</p>
<p>The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan or programme.</p>	
<p>The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected.</p>	
<p>Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan or programme including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance, such as areas designated pursuant to Directives 79/409/EEC on the conservation of wild birds and the Habitats Directive.</p>	

SEA Regulations requirements	Covered in this Scoping Report?
The environmental protection, objectives, established at international, Community or Member State level, which are relevant to the plan or programme and the way those objectives and any environmental, considerations have been taken into account during its preparation.	
<p>The likely significant effects on the environment, including short, medium and long-term effects, permanent and temporary effects, positive effects, and secondary, cumulative and synergistic effects, on issues such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) biodiversity; (b) population; (c) human health; (d) fauna; (e) flora; (f) soil; (g) water; (h) air; (i) climatic factors; (j) material assets; (k) cultural heritage, including architectural and archaeological heritage; (l) landscape; and (m) the interrelationship between the issues referred to in sub-paragraphs (a) to (l). 	Requirement will be met at a later stage in the SA process. Chapters 6 to 8 of this SA Scoping Report describes the method by which significant effects will be identified.
The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the plan or programme.	Requirement will be met at a later stage in the SA process.
An outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with, and a description of how the assessment was undertaken including any difficulties (such as technical deficiencies or lack of know-how) encountered in compiling the required information.	
A description of the measures envisaged concerning monitoring in accordance with regulation 17.	
A non-technical summary of the information is provided.	

SEA Regulations requirements	Covered in this Scoping Report?
<p>The report shall include such of the information referred to in Schedule 2 to these Regulations as may reasonably be required, taking account of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • current knowledge and methods of assessment; • the contents and level of detail in the plan or programme; the stage of the plan or programme in the decision-making process; and • the extent to which certain matters are more appropriately assessed at different levels in that process in order to avoid duplication of the assessment. (Regulation 12 (3)) 	<p>This SA Scoping Report and the 'environmental report' will adhere to this requirement.</p>
Consultation	
<p>When deciding on the scope and level of detail of the information that must be included in the environmental report, the responsible authority shall consult the consultation bodies. (Regulation 12(5))</p>	<p>This SA Scoping Report will be published for consultation with the three statutory bodies (the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England).</p>
<p>Every draft plan or programme for which an environmental report has been prepared in accordance with Regulation 12 and its accompanying report (“the relevant documents”) shall be made available for the purposes of consultation in accordance with the following provisions of this regulation. As soon as reasonably practical after the preparation of the relevant documents, the responsible authority shall:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • send a copy of those documents to each consultation body; • take such steps as it considers appropriate to bring the preparation of the relevant documents to the attention of the persons who, in the authority’s opinion, are affected or likely to be affected by, or have an interest in the decisions involved in the assessment and adoption of the plan or programme concerned, required under the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Directive (“the public consultees”); 	<p>Public consultation on the Stafford Borough New Local Plan and accompanying SA Reports will take place as the Local Plan develops.</p>

SEA Regulations requirements	Covered in this Scoping Report?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> inform the public consultees of the address (which may include a website) at which a copy of the relevant documents may be viewed, and the period within which, opinions must be sent. The period referred to in paragraph (2) (d) must be of such length as will ensure that the consultation bodies and the public consultees are given an effective opportunity to express their opinion on the relevant documents. (Regulation 13 (1), (2), and (3)) 	
<p>Where a responsible authority, other than the Secretary of State, is of the opinion that a plan or programme for which it is the responsible authority is likely to have significant effects on the environment of another Member State, it shall, as soon as reasonably practicable after forming that opinion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> notify the Secretary of State of its opinion and of the reasons for it; and supply the Secretary of State with a copy of the plan or programme concerned, and of the accompanying environmental report. (Regulation 14 (1)) 	<p>Unlikely to be relevant to the Stafford Borough Local Plan, as there will be no effects beyond the UK.</p>
<p>Taking the environmental report and the results of the consultations into account in decision-making (relevant extracts of Regulation 16)</p>	
<p>As soon as reasonably practicable after the adoption of a plan or programme for which an environmental assessment has been carried out under these Regulations, the responsible authority shall: make a copy of the plan or programme and its accompanying environmental report available at its principal office for inspection by the public at all reasonable times and free of charge. (Regulation 16(1))</p>	<p>Requirement will be met at a later stage in the SA process.</p>
<p>The responsible authority shall inform (i) the consultation bodies; (ii) the persons who, in relation to the plan or programme, were public consultees for the purposes of regulation 13; and (iii) where the responsible authority is not the Secretary of State, the Secretary of State,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> that the plan or programme has been adopted, and a statement containing the following particulars: 	

SEA Regulations requirements	Covered in this Scoping Report?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how environmental considerations have been integrated into the plan or programme; • how the environmental report has been taken into account; • how opinions expressed in response to: (i) the invitation in regulation 13(2)(d); (ii) action taken by the responsible authority in accordance with regulation 13(4), have been taken into account; • how the results of any consultations entered into under regulation 14(4) have been taken into account; • the reasons for choosing the plan or programme as adopted, in the light of the other reasonable alternatives dealt with; and • the measures that are to be taken to monitor the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the plan or programme. 	
Monitoring	
<p>The responsible authority shall monitor the significant effects of the implementation of each plan or programme with the purpose of identifying unforeseen adverse effects at an early stage and being able to undertake appropriate remedial action. (Regulation 17(1))</p>	<p>Requirement will be met after adoption of the Stafford Borough New Local Plan 2025-2045.</p>

4. Stafford Borough Local Plan preparation process

Schedule 2 of the SEA Regulations requires the SA Report to provide

"An outline of the contents and main objectives of the plan or programme, and of its relationship with other relevant plans and programmes."

The current Local Plan was adopted 19 June 2014 and comprises of

- The Plan for Stafford Borough
- The Plan for Stafford Borough - Part 2 (adopted 31 January 2017)
- Made/Adopted Neighbourhood Development Plans

In July 2017 the Council carried out its Local Plan Review when a consultation on the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report took place. This was then followed by consultations:

- New Local Plan - Scoping the Issues July 2018 and New Local Plan - Settlement Assessment documents.
- New Local Plan - Issues and Options February to April 2020.
- New Local Plan - Preferred Options October 2022 to December 2022

Following the new requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) December 2024, Cabinet took the decision on 6 March 2025 to stop work on the Local Plan 2020-2040 and begin investigation of and to develop a new Local Plan 2025 to 2045 through the new plan-making process.

The new Local Plan 2025-2045 will replace the existing Local Plan documents. The Local Plan will be a borough-wide plan that will coordinate the development and growth requirements of the Borough over a period of 20 years. The Council is at an early stage in the development of the new Local Plan.

Future plan-making will need to consider changes occurring due to Local Government Reorganisation. The devolution framework sets out that there will be three types of Strategic Authorities (these are all combined authorities):

- **Foundation Strategic Authorities** - non-mayoral Combined Authorities (CA), Level 2 County Combined Authorities (CCA), or any local authorities designated as a Strategic Authority without a mayor.
- **Mayoral Strategic Authorities** - Greater London Authority, Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCA) and Mayoral Combined County Authorities (MCCA).
- **Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities** - any Mayoral Strategic Authorities that meet specific criteria, in particular having had a directly elected mayor for at least 18 months. Initially these will be North East, South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, West Midlands, Greater Manchester and Liverpool City Region Strategic Authorities.

The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill white paper restates the Government's ambition that all areas will ultimately have a Mayoral Strategic Authority. In two-tier areas, Government will only establish CCAs for an interim period. Councils in all 21 two-tier areas will be expected to reorganise over this Parliament and the next.

All areas, regardless of whether they have a Strategic Authority in place, will have to produce a Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) through the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025.

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.

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.

5. Relevant Plans, Programmes and Environmental Objectives

A Development Plan is not prepared in isolation, being greatly influenced by other plans, policies and programmes and by broader sustainability objectives. It needs to be consistent with international, national guidance and strategic planning policies. It should contribute to the goals of a wide range of other programmes and strategies, such as those relating to social policy, culture and heritage. It must also conform to environmental protection legislation and the sustainability objectives established at an international, national and local level.

A review has been undertaken of the other plans, policies and programmes that are relevant to identify the environmental protection, social and economic objectives, established at international, national and local level, which are relevant to the plan or programme. The review of relevant plans, policies and programmes can be seen in full in the Technical Appendices. The key plans, policies and programmes are summarised below.

At the international level, Directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment (the 'SEA Directive') and Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (the 'Habitats Directive') are particularly significant as they require Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) to be undertaken.

There are a wide range of other EU Directives relating to issues such as water quality, waste and air quality, most of which have been transposed into UK law through national-level policy. However the international directives have been included in Technical Appendix for completeness.

In accordance with the UK official SEA guidance (ODPM, 2005), and supported by the UK SA and SEA guidance (updated 2020) which provides an overview of the level of detail required, no list of plans or programmes can be definitive. As a result, this report describes only the key plans, programmes and policies that may influence the Stafford Borough New Local Plan. International, national, regional and local policies, plans and programmes have been reviewed through this sustainability process, as outlined below.

Plans, programmes and policies

The relevant international, national, regional and local plans relevant to Stafford Borough Local Plan and the SA are listed in the Technical Appendix. A description of why they are relevant and how they need to be considered throughout plan development is also provided.

The key environmental, social and economic themes identified by this review, including relevant planning policies outlined within Government’s planning policy for England (the NPPF), are shown below:

SA Topic	Key Themes
Environment	
Landscape character	Protection of sensitive landscape assets (including Special Landscape Areas (SLA) and National Landscapes (formerly Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB))); promotion of the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty and amenity of important landscapes, including inland waters; definition and protection of regional and local landscape character; and the provision and enhancement of natural beauty and amenity of important landscapes, including inland waters; and the provision and enhancement of green infrastructure to benefit people and the environment.

SA Topic	Key Themes
Biodiversity and nature conservation	Protection of international and national designated sites and their qualifying features; preservation and enhancement of notable habitats and species, particularly those noted for their conservation value or under threat; protection and enhancement of valued sites of biodiversity and geodiversity value; identification of the roles and responsibilities of organisations including local authorities to protect and enhance biodiversity including the creation of local Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitats and species and promotion of BAP species; provision of new / restored habitat to enable species to adapt to the future impacts of climate change; recognising the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services; and minimising impacts with provision of net gains through development.
Water environment	Promotion of the sustainable use of water resources to meet future growth in demand and impacts of climate change; better regulation and management of the water environment to benefit water resources and flood risk, and the reduction of water pollution; avoidance and redirection of inappropriate development in areas at medium and high risks of flooding; minimise risk to people and property and reduce the impacts of flooding where possible; and promotion of sustainable drainage systems (SuDS).
Land use	Long term protection, improvement and sustainable management of soil quality and quantity, including the preservation of best and most versatile land (Grades 1, 2, and 3a); maximum use of brownfield land as is feasible; optimisation of land to meet housing need; consideration of suitability of ground conditions for development; and the management and remediation of contaminated land to reduce the risk to human health and the environment, particularly soils and water quality.

SA Topic	Key Themes
Historic environment	Protection and enhancement of nationally and locally important heritage assets and historic landscapes; better integration of heritage protection within the planning process; consideration of wider benefits of conservation of the historic environment; and provision of better access to heritage sites including their promotion as an economic asset.
Air Quality	Protection of air quality through enhanced management of polluting emissions; prevention of new and existing development contributing to, being put at risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of air pollution; and implementation of relevant limit values for pollutants such as air quality management areas (AQMAs) and clean air zones.
Climate	Requirements to reduce future greenhouse gas emissions across all socio-economic sectors to limit the impacts of climate change on people and the environment; provision of measures to enable future adaptation to the impacts of climate change and increased resilience; proactive approach to mitigating and adapting to climate change; and consideration of identification of suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy sources and supportive infrastructure where this would help secure their development.
Social	
Population and Human Health	Protection and improvement of human health, wellbeing and living standards; greater integration of socio-economic and environmental objectives to deliver sustainable development; promotion of prosperous, sustainable and coherent communities; provision of better public transport and access; reduction of flood risk; enhancement of/minimising loss of recreation and amenity resources to benefit health and wellbeing; protection and enhancement of public rights of way and access; identifying housing requirement; and development and provision of measures to enable adaptation to the impacts of climate change.

SA Topic	Key Themes
Economic	
Local economy	Encourage sustainable economic growth; maximise economic value and the benefits of innovation; encourage economic development through the delivery of sufficient land and tourism development; encourage enterprise, including the creation of new businesses and aiding the growth and development of small businesses; release local growth potential; enable sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas; development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based businesses; tackle worklessness and deprivation; promote links with neighbouring economies to allow the full potential of regional strengths to be recognised.
Material assets	Improvement and better management of material assets including highways and utilities infrastructure; encourage use of sustainable materials including secondary or recycled materials before extraction or primary materials; source materials indigenously; greater provision and enhancement of green infrastructure to delivery benefits to people and the environment; and provision of better public services to deliver socio economic benefits.
Waste and minerals	Sustainable use of mineral resources and improvement in the effects on the environment of their extraction.

Neighbourhood Plans

Neighbourhood Plans, once made/adopted, form part of the development plan for a local authority area. There are six 'made' (adopted) Neighbourhood Plans within Stafford Borough:

- Barlaston Neighbourhood Plan
- Colwich Neighbourhood Plan
- Eccleshall Neighbourhood Plan
- Gnosall Neighbourhood Plan

- Hixon Neighbourhood Plan
- Stone Town Neighbourhood Plan

Key national plans, policies and programmes

Levelling up and Regeneration Act 2023

The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act (LURA) 2023 supports the Government's manifesto commitment to level up the United Kingdom. The Government's objective is to reduce geographical disparities between different parts of the United Kingdom by spreading opportunity more equally.

To support the change needed, the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act has four overarching objectives:

- (a) To place a duty on the Government to set, and report annually on progress towards achieving, levelling up missions to reduce geographical disparities across the United Kingdom;
- (b) To create a framework to support the devolution of powers through the creation of a new model of combined county authorities to support delivery of the Government's levelling up mission that 'by 2030, every part of England that wants one will have a devolution deal with powers at or approaching the highest level of devolution and a simplified, long-term funding settlement' 2 ;
- (c) To deliver new powers for local authorities to regenerate their towns through high street rental auctions and reforms to compulsory purchase to support delivery of the Government's levelling up mission that 'by 2030, pride in place, such as people's satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture and community, will have risen in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing'; and
- (d) To create a planning system which delivers more beautiful and greener homes, with the associated infrastructure and democratic support for neighbourhoods.

The Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025

The primary aim of the Planning and Infrastructure Act (PIA) 2025 is to reform the planning system, removing delays and blockages in planning processes.

Key provisions of the Act are:

- (a) **Development Consent Orders (DCOs):** The Act streamlines the DCO process, reducing pre-application requirements and speeding up examination and approval stages.
- (b) **Housing and Infrastructure Delivery:** It facilitates the construction of up to 1.5 million new homes, accelerates major transport projects, and supports clean energy initiatives.
- (c) **Environmental and Land Measures:** Provisions include compulsory land purchase, environmental outcomes reporting, and powers to modify consents for electricity networks and generating stations.
- (d) **Delegation and Planning Committees:** The Act allows the government to introduce a national scheme of delegation, determining which planning applications are handled by committees versus officers, with mandatory training for committee members to ensure compliance with planning law.
- (e) **Energy and Utilities:** It prioritizes grid connections for clean power projects, supports long-duration electricity storage, and provides benefits for homes near transmission projects.
- (f) **Economic Impact:** The reforms are projected to inject up to £7.5 billion into the UK economy over the next decade, creating jobs, reducing congestion, and improving energy security.

The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) Regulations 2026

These regulations replace the Town and Country Planning Regulations 2012. These regulations implement the new, faster local plan-making system designed to speed up housing delivery. There is a transitional period during 2026 which allows Councils to use either old or new regulations, with the final deadline for old-style plan submissions being 31 December 2026.

National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is the overarching planning framework which provides national planning policy and principles for the planning system in England. The NPPF was originally published in March 2012, and has been revised several times, the latest being December 2024. A further revision is anticipated in the Summer 2026 following the most recent NPPF consultation.

NPPF states that plans should *“be prepared with the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development”* The NPPF also requires Local Plans to be ‘aspirational but realistic’. This means that opportunities for appropriate development should be identified to achieve net gains in terms of sustainable social, environmental and economic development; however significant adverse impacts in any of those areas should not be allowed to occur.

The NPPF requires local planning authorities to set out the strategic priorities for the area in the Local Plan. This should include strategic policies to deliver:

- the homes and jobs needed in the area;
- the provision of retail, leisure and other commercial development;
- the provision of infrastructure for transport, telecommunications, waste management, water supply, wastewater, flood risk and coastal change management, and the provision of minerals and energy (including heat);
- the provision of health, security, community and cultural infrastructure and other local facilities; and
- climate change mitigation and adaptation, conservation and enhancement of the natural and historic environment, including landscape.

In addition, Local Plans should:

- plan positively for the development and infrastructure required in the area to meet the objectives, principles and policies of the Framework;
- be drawn up over an appropriate time scale, preferably a 15-year time horizon, take account of longer term requirements, and be kept up to date;
- be based on co-operation with neighbouring authorities, public, voluntary and private sector organisations;

- indicate broad locations for strategic development on a key diagram and land-use designations on a proposals map;
- allocate sites to promote development and flexible use of land, bringing forward new land where necessary, and provide detail on form, scale, access and quantum of development where appropriate;
- identify areas where it may be necessary to limit freedom to change the uses of buildings, and support such restrictions with a clear explanation;
- identify land where development would be inappropriate, for instance because of its environmental or historic significance; and
- contain a clear strategy for enhancing the natural, built and historic environment, and supporting Nature Improvement Areas where they have been identified.

The overarching nature of the NPPF means that its implications for the SA relate to multiple topics which this report seeks to address. Considering the importance of the NPPF to the English planning system, the relevance of the Framework and its implications for the plan making process and the SA is provided in more detail below. Sustainability topics are separated into environmental, social and economic below, but consideration of issues often cuts across topics.

There are a wide range of plans and programmes that are specific to Stafford Borough. These plans and programmes relate to issues such as housing, transport, renewable energy and green infrastructure, and developer contributions. A review of these documents can be found in the Technical Appendix.

6. Baseline Information

Stafford Borough Council has collected significant data about the current state of the environment, economy and society to assess the effects of implementing the Development Plan from the sustainability perspective.

The following tables provides a selection of baseline data which will be used as the basis for prediction and monitoring of environmental and other sustainability effects to monitor how the sustainability position is improving or deteriorating in relation to the Development Plan. This approach will help to identify issues and alternative ways of dealing with such issues in the future.

The last Census 2021 took place during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, which was a period of unparalleled and rapid change. The national lockdown, associated guidance and furlough measures will have affected the labour market and travel to work topic. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) have advised care should be applied when using this data for planning and policy purposes.

Social, health and wellbeing

Between the last two censuses (held in 2011 and 2021), the population of Stafford Borough increased by 4.6%, from just under 130,900 in 2011 to around 136,900 in 2021. The population here increased by a smaller percentage than the overall population of the West Midlands (6.2%), and by a smaller percentage than the overall population of England (up 6.6% since the 2011 Census). Most of the population of the Borough live within Stafford or Stone, with the remaining percentage of the population living within the rural areas. As of 2021, Stafford Borough is the eighth least densely populated of the West Midlands' 20 local authority areas.¹

Housing

The total population in households in Stafford Borough that the time of the 2021 Census was 134,656, a total of 60,047 households.

39.1% of households in the Borough are owner-occupiers without a mortgage, compared to 34.4% in the region and 32.5% nationally. The proportion of owner-occupiers with a mortgage in Stafford Borough (31.7%) is also higher than both the regional (31.4%) and national average (28.8%).

In Stafford Borough the proportion of households in Shared Ownership accommodation (at 0.8%) is the same as the regional figure but lower than the national equivalent (1.0%). Some 13.6% of households in Stafford Borough are resident in the Social Rented sector, lower than the figure for the West Midlands (18.2%) and England (17.1%). Finally, some 15.5% of households in Stafford Borough live in private rented accommodation, compared to 18.1% in the West Midlands and 20.6% in England.

¹ Office for National Statistics (2025). How the population changed in Stafford: Census 2021 [Stafford population change, Census 2021 – ONS](#)

Gypsy and Travellers

The 2011 Census identified a total of 50 households in Stafford Borough where the Household Reference Person had a 'White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller' ethnicity. Of these, 26 lived in a caravan and 24 in bricks and mortar housing.

Gypsy and Traveller provision includes one council site (9 pitches), seven private authorised sites (94 pitches) and one unauthorised site (5 pitches).

There are no Travelling Showperson's yards in the borough. Private sites tend to be occupied by extended family groups. This means the ability of non-family members to move onto private sites is limited. The bi-annual DCLG Traveller caravan count (Jan 2016 to Jan 2020) reported an average of 84 caravans on Gypsy and Traveller sites and none on Travelling Showperson's yards.

Aging Population

Between the last two Censuses, there has been an increase of 24.6% in people aged 65 years and over, a decrease of 1.7% in people aged 15 to 64 years, and an increase of 4.9% in children aged under 15 years. The average (median) age of Stafford Borough increased by two years, from 43 to 45 years of age. This area had a higher average (median) age than the West Midlands as a whole in 2021 (40 years) and a higher average (median) age than England (40 years). The number of people aged 75 to 84 years rose by around 3,100 (an increase of 38.9%), while the number of residents between 35 and 49 years fell by just under 3,300 (11.6% decrease).

Health

In 2021, 48.5% of Stafford Borough residents described their health as "very good", increasing from 46.3% in 2011. Those describing their health as "good" fell from 35.5% to 34.5%. These are age-standardised proportions.

The proportion of Stafford Borough residents describing their health as "very bad" was 1.0% (similar to 2011), while those describing their health as "bad" fell from 3.9% to 3.5%.

Census 2021 was conducted during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This may have influenced how people perceived and rated their health, and therefore may have affected how people chose to respond.

Indicators

Social, Health and Wellbeing Baseline Data

Indicator	Quantified data (for Stafford Borough unless stated)	Comparators and Targets	Assessment / Trend	Issues Identified?	Action / Issues for Plan / SA
Ageing population (percentage aged 65 and over)²	2025 (estimate) 23.2%	2025 (estimate) West Midlands: 18.9% England: 18.7%	Stafford Borough has a relatively high number of residents aged 65 and over compared to the regional and national average	Ageing population	Consider actions which can be taken to cater for an ageing population.
Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)	2025 5.3% of people in the most deprived quartile	West Midlands: 29.9% of people in the most deprived quartile	Stafford Borough has a relatively low percentage of people in the most deprived quartile	Favourable situation against regional and national rankings	Focus on reducing deprivation within communities across the Borough
Statutory homelessness ³ (homelessness acceptances per 1000 households)	April 2024 to March 2025 6.1 %	England: 7.5%	Performing well in comparison to the regional and national figures	Favourable position	Focus on reducing homelessness in the Borough

² [Local area data | Staffordshire County Council](#)

³ [Tables on homelessness - GOV.UK](#)

Social, Health and Wellbeing Baseline Data

Affordable housing completions ¹²	2024 / 2025: 199	Since 2014, Stafford Borough has delivered 2,167 affordable homes. Annual average 2011-2025: 171	Performing well against the Borough's target	Favourable position	Maintain and improve the current position across the Borough
Housing Affordability Ratio (ratio of lower quartile house prices to lower quartile earnings) ⁴	2025 Ratio: 7.46 5 year average: 7.45	England and Wales ratio: 7.55 5 year average: 8.19 Regional average: 6.80	Similar to the national ratio	Neither favourable or unfavourable position	Provide a housing mix to ensure a range of housing
Total recorded crime excl. fraud (rate per 1000) ¹⁵	2025: 64.2	West Midlands: 89.8 England: 88.6	Performing well in comparison to the regional and national figures	Favourable position	Maintain and improve the current position across the Borough
Lone pensioner households ¹⁵	2025: 13.9%	West Midlands: 13.1% England: 12.8%	Performing slightly worse than the regional and national average	Slightly unfavourable position	Improve the current position across the Borough

⁴ [Housing affordability in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics](#) (local authority housing affordability analysis)

Social, Health and Wellbeing Baseline Data

Physical activity in adults (percentage) ¹⁵	2022/23: 68.4%	West Midlands: 64.0% England: 67.1%	Performing well in comparison to the regional and national figures	Favourable position	Continue to promote physical activity in Stafford Borough
Adults who are overweight or obese ¹⁵	2022-23: 63.5%	West Midlands: 67% England: 64.0%	Performing well in comparison to the regional and national figures	Favourable position	Continue to promote physical activity in Stafford Borough
Limiting long-term illness (percentage) ¹⁵	2011: 18.2%	West Midlands: 19.0% England: 17.6%	Performing slightly better than the regional average and slightly worse than the national average	Neither favourable or unfavourable condition	Maintain and improve the current position across the Borough
Mortality from causes considered preventable (ASR per 100,000) ¹⁵	2021-2023: 158	Stafford: 136.4 (558) Staffordshire: 152.4 (3,913) West Midlands: 176.8 (27,458) England: 163.7 (243,060)	Performing well against the regional and national average	Favourable position	Maintain and improve the current position across the Borough

Social, Health and Wellbeing Baseline Data

Buildings 'at risk' ⁵	8 buildings were on the 2025 buildings at risk register equating to around 1% of listed buildings in the Borough	Staffordshire: 42 West Midlands : 402	Performing well against the regional average	Favourable position	Maintain and improve the current position across the Borough
Homes with a Housing Health and Safety Rating (HHSRS) hazard	2011: 16% average (Stafford Borough is performing particularly poorly in the excess cold monitor).	England: 15% average	Performing slightly worse than the England average	Slightly unfavourable condition	Need to improve the quality of the Borough's existing and new housing stock
Occupancy rating (bedrooms) ⁶	2021: Occupancy rating of bedrooms -2 or less: 90	2021 West Midlands: 4.59 %	Performing well against the regional and national average	Favourable position	Maintain and improve the current position across the Borough

⁵ Historic England – Annual Heritage at Risk Registers and Maps (2025) [Annual Heritage at Risk Registers and Maps | Historic England](#)

⁶ Office for National Statistics Census 2021 [Occupancy rating for bedrooms - Office for National Statistics](#)

Social, Health and Wellbeing Baseline Data					
Percentage of long term empty homes ⁷	2021: Vacant dwellings: 2,495 Second homes: 115 (4.1%)	West Midlands Vacant dwellings: 117,030 Second homes: 5,600 (4.8%)	Performing relatively poorly against the regional average.	Unfavourable condition	Need to improve the current position
Depression prevalence (ages 18+) ¹⁵	2022/23: 13.5%	Staffordshire: 14.2% West Midlands: 14% England: 13.2%	The figures are slightly lower than the regional average	Neither favourable or unfavourable position	Continue to work with partners to support mental health across the Borough
Neighbourhood Development Plans ¹²	Since 2011: 13 areas designated 6 with 'made' plans	No comparators	No trends	Neither favourable or unfavourable position	Continue to support community groups creating Neighbourhood Development Plans

⁷ Office for National Statistics Census 2021 [Number of vacant dwellings and second homes \(with no usual residents\) - Office for National Statistics](#)

Social, Health and Wellbeing Baseline Data

Number of voluntary organisations registered with Support Staffordshire which deliver in Stafford Borough ⁸	April 2017: 161	No comparators available	No trends available	Neither favourable or unfavourable position	Maintain/improve current performance
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⁸ Support Staffordshire State of the Sector 2023 [State-of-the-Sector-2023-Digital-v1.4.pdf](#)

Economic Baseline Data

Stafford Borough is a major economic hub and has seen significant investment and growth over the last decade with major investors and businesses attracted to the area due to the availability of sites, infrastructure, affordability, and quality of life. The Borough is home to over 5,000 businesses, employing around 70,000 people and is Staffordshire's largest and most populous borough covering around 230 square miles and with a population of 138,670. Stafford town is the borough's principal town and main provider of services, facilities, employment and transport links. Stone is an important market town and second principal town and main provider of services, facilities, employment and transport links.

The Stafford Borough Economic Growth Strategy 2020-2025 is to be refreshed during 2026-2027.

In 2021 the percentage of people aged 16 years and over in Stafford Borough who were employed (excluding full-time students) decreased from 57.4% in 2011 to 56.4% in 2021. During the same period, the percentage in nearby South Staffordshire decreased from 57.5% to 53.3%.

The percentage of people aged 16 years and over who were unemployed (excluding full-time students) in Stafford Borough fell from 2.8% to 2.0%, while the percentage of people aged 16 years and over who were retired (economically inactive) increased from 24.7% to 27.2%.

Work patterns changed during the pandemic with 25.2% of Staffordshire residents said that they worked mainly at or from home, lower than national (31.5%) but slightly higher than the overall former Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) area (23.1%). This is likely impacted by more people working in sectors where home working was not possible, for example retail and construction.

Indicators

Economic Baseline Data					
Indicator	Quantified data (for Stafford Borough unless stated)	Comparators and Targets	Assessment/Trend	Issues Identified?	Action / Issues for Plan / SA
Qualifications NVQ Level 4 or above (percentage) ⁹	2025 NVQ 21.9% <i>No qualifications:</i> 19.3%	NVQ : West Midlands: 29.4% Great Britain: 33.9% <i>No qualifications:</i> West Midlands: 21.1% Great Britain: 18.1%	Performing well against the regional and national average	Favourable position	Maintain good performance
Number of enterprises ¹⁰	2025 5,370	West Midlands: 216,145	Performing below the national and regional average	Favourable / Unfavourable position	Improve upon current position

⁹ Staffordshire Observatory - [Local area data | Staffordshire County Council](#)

¹⁰ UK Business Counts 2025 [Labour Market Profile - Nomis - Official Census and Labour Market Statistics](#)

Economic Baseline Data					
Number of enterprises local units ¹¹	2025 6,350	West Midlands: 252,320			
Completion of land employment provision ¹²	Hectares (ha) completed 2024/25: 0.7 ha Annual average between 2011-2025: 8.1 ha	The Plan for Stafford Borough 2011-2031 set an annual target of 8 ha	Employment land completions have been below the annual target per year (apart from 2022/23)	Unfavourable position	Need to deliver more employment land across the Borough
Percentage of vacant retail units (Stafford Town Centre) ¹³	Dec 2016 Stafford Town Centre: 14%	England: 11%	Performing poorly against the national average	Unfavourable position	Deliver ways to reduce vacant units in town centre
Percentage of retail, leisure and office developments which have been in the Town Centres ¹²	2023/24: 30% 2024/25: 0% As of 2024/25 only 8% of commitments (sites with permission but not yet built) are within town centres	Target: Maximise developments in the town centres	Performing poorly	Unfavourable position	Deliver ways to reduce vacant units in town centre

¹¹ UK Business Counts 2025 [Labour Market Profile - Nomis - Official Census and Labour Market Statistics](#)

¹² Stafford Borough Authority Monitoring Report 2025 [Authority Monitoring Report 2025](#)

¹³ Stafford Borough Council data / Local Data Company

Economic Baseline Data					
Job Seekers Allowance (percentage) ¹⁴	Feb 2026 2.5%	West Midlands: 5.3% England: 1.9%	Stafford Borough is performing well compared to the regional and national average	Favourable position	Maintain strong performance
Dependency ratio of older people per 100 working age population ¹⁵	2025: 38.6%	West Midlands: 30.6% England: 29.7%	Stafford Borough has a higher ratio of dependent older people than the regional and national average	Unfavourable position	Improve current position
Youth unemployment (185-24 claimant counts) ¹⁵	December 2024: 4.8%	Staffordshire: 4.8% West Midlands: 7.4%	Stafford Borough is performing well compared to the regional and national average	Slightly favourable position	Maintain strong performance

¹⁴ Nomis - [Labour Market Profile - Nomis - Official Census and Labour Market Statistics](#)

¹⁵ Staffordshire Observatory – Stafford: Locality Profile

Environmental Baseline Data

A desk study was performed to identify the key baseline environmental, social, and economic characteristics of Stafford Borough. This includes details of the status and condition of notable environmental features; current and future predicted trends in evolution of the environment, social and economic aspects; and issues and problems currently affecting the environment and population.

The information obtained is set out in the following topic-specific sections, many of which are interlinked. The information used to characterise the baseline environment is broadly strategic in nature and reflects the high-level nature of the Local Plan. It has been obtained from a broad range of sources and no new investigations or surveys have been undertaken as part of the scoping process. The baseline information will be required throughout the SA process and may require updating as the Local Plan is developed and further and new information becomes available.

Landscape

Landscape character

There are 4 National Character Areas (NCA) within the Borough described by Natural England¹⁶ below:

¹⁶ Natural England – National Character Area Profiles (2026) [Natural England - National Character Area Profiles - National Character Area Profiles](#)

National Character Area	Summary	Key Characteristics
<p>NCA 61 Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plain</p>	<p>An expanse of flat or gently undulating, lush, pastoral farmland, which is bounded by the Mersey Valley NCA in the north, with its urban and industrial development, and extending to the rural Shropshire Hills NCA in the south. To the west, it is bounded by the hills of the Welsh borders and to the east and south-east by the urban areas within the Potteries and Churnet Valley, Needwood and South Derbyshire Claylands, and Cannock Chase and Cank Wood NCAs.</p>	<p>Extensive, gently undulating plain, dominated by thick glacial till from the late Pleistocene Period, producing productive, clay soils and exemplifying characteristic glacial landforms including eskers, glacial fans, kettle holes, moraines and a landscape of meres and mosses.</p> <p>Prominent discontinuous sandstone ridges of Triassic age, characterised by steep sides and freely draining, generally infertile soil that supports broadleaved and mixed woodland.</p> <p>Few woodlands, confined to the area around Northwich and to estates, cloughs and deciduous and mixed woods on the steeper slopes of the wind-swept sandstone ridges. Locally extensive tracts of coniferous woodland and locally distinctive orchards scattered throughout.</p> <p>Strong field patterns with generally well-maintained boundaries, predominantly hedgerows, with dense, mature hedgerow trees. Sandstone walls occur on the ridges and estate walls and Cheshire-style (curved topped) metal railing fences occur locally on estates in Cheshire.</p> <p>Dairy farming dominates on the plain, with patches of mixed farming and arable in the north and large areas in the south-east.</p> <p>Diversity of wetland habitats includes internationally important meres and mosses comprising lowland raised bog, fen, wet woodland, reedbed and standing water, supporting populations of a host of rare wildlife, including some species of national and international importance.</p> <p>Extensive peat flood plains where flood plain grazing marsh habitats support regionally important populations of breeding waders in areas such as Baggy Moor, Weald Moor and Doxey Marshes.</p>

National Character Area	Summary	Key Characteristics
		<p>Many main rivers and their flood plains lie in this area, including the Dee, Dane, Severn, Penk and Sow. Significant areas of grazing marsh, alluvial flood meadows and hay meadows associated with the rivers Dee, Sow, Gowy and Severn. The area has the highest density of field ponds in western Europe.</p> <p>Rich archaeological evidence of iron-age hill forts concentrated on the sandstone ridges and the Weald Moors. Remnant ridge and furrow and moated houses are features of the plain. The Roman road, Watling Street, crosses the plain linking London to Wales via Wroxeter. Chester was an important Roman settlement.</p> <p>Regularly spaced, large farmsteads, dispersed hamlets, market towns and many other settlements including Macclesfield and Telford. Timber-frame buildings are a distinctive feature of the plain, often highly decorated in Cheshire, for example, the moated Little Moreton Hall. The historic towns including Stafford, Shrewsbury and the city of Chester have a wealth of 17th- and 18th-century half-timber, brick and red sandstone buildings.</p> <p>Parklands and gardens associated with estates such as Chillington, Trentham, Tatton and Attingham; country houses such as Gawsworth Hall, Arley Hall and Adlington Hall; and fortified manor houses and castles such as at Shrewsbury, Stafford, Beeston, Acton Burnell and Cholmondeley.</p> <p>Nationally important reserves of silica sand and salt. Active extraction of salt has developed a locally distinctive landscape of subsidence flashes, particularly around the area of Sandbach. Adjacent to these saline flashes are areas of salt marsh rarely found at inland sites.</p>

National Character Area	Summary	Key Characteristics
		<p>The numerous canals are important for recreation as well as habitat. Several National Cycle Routes and nearly 5,000 km of public rights of way cross the plain. Six National Nature Reserves (NNRs) are scattered throughout, close to large population centres and well used for recreation.</p>
<p>NCA 64 Potteries and Churnet Valley</p>	<p>A strong contrast between the industrialised landscape of the Potteries and the pastoral, strongly dissected hills and small plateaux that flank the Churnet and Dove valleys. Natural resources associated with the Coal Measures enabled industrial development leading to the settlement patterns of the Potteries, which form a large conurbation. There is a rich industrial heritage associated with manufacturing, particularly of pottery and the mining of coal, clay, minerals and metal ores,</p>	<p>Dissected hills and small plateaux, cut by river valleys and steep ravines, contrast with the industrial and densely settled conurbation of the Potteries.</p> <p>Sandstones from the Millstone Grit Group and Coal Measures produce prominent, roughly north–south ridges. Softer mudstones with poorly drained and seasonally waterlogged soils and peaty soils form the intervening moorland plateaux, and mudstones and siltstones from the Triassic Mercia Mudstone Group underlie the generally lower-lying ground on the margins of the Needwood Basin.</p> <p>The well-wooded character throughout the Churnet Valley contrasts strongly with the urban, sparsely wooded landscapes of the Potteries. Many of the woodlands in the south consist of conifer plantations managed for commercial forestry.</p> <p>Deep, fast-flowing rivers Churnet, Trent, Dove and their tributaries drain the area. Riffles, scour ponds, subsidence pools and numerous small ponds provide ecological connectivity.</p> <p>Hedgerow banks with hedgerow oaks confine small pastures in the Churnet Valley; in the north, hedgerows are gappy and hedgerow trees are few. At higher elevations, drystone walls replace hedgerows and fields are larger and rectilinear.</p>

National Character Area	Summary	Key Characteristics
	<p>which contributes strongly to the sense of place.</p>	<p>Agriculture is predominantly permanent pasture for grazing and stock rearing with some dairying; flatter areas are used for silage production and some arable cropping in the south, mainly cereals.</p> <p>Ancient semi-natural woodland occurs predominantly in the valleys with grasslands and grazing marsh within valley bottoms, especially the lower reaches of the Churnet and in the Dove Valley; there is heathland on higher ground and significant areas of open mosaic habitat on restored industrial land within urban areas.</p> <p>There is a rich heritage associated with iron production, coal mining, silk production and, most notably, pottery; the area is characterised by industrial and residential development in the Potteries and waterpowered flint mills and foundries in the Churnet Valley, linked by historic trade routes.</p> <p>Historic heathland habitats remain with their smallholdings – rare surviving examples of rural–industrial landscapes.</p> <p>Historic parklands are characterised by woodland belts enclosing grassland with parkland trees and avenues with vistas. Some ancient wood pastures and squatter enclosures occur – once a common feature of the landscape, they provided shelter, pasture and fodder for livestock.</p> <p>Red brick manufactured from the local Etruria Marl and sandstone from the Coal Measures are predominantly used as building materials in lowland areas; Millstone Grit is used in upland areas in farmhouses and drystone walls. Plain clay and large numbers of Staffordshire blue tiles or Welsh slate are used for roofing.</p>

National Character Area	Summary	Key Characteristics
		<p>There is a contrast between the settlement pattern of valley-bottom villages with scattered farmsteads and hamlets on the valley slopes in the east and the sprawling conurbation of the Potteries in the west.</p> <p>Major transport infrastructure includes several A roads (A34, A50 and A52) and the Stoke-on-Trent to London railway. The Caldon Canal and Trent and Mersey Canal link the conurbation with the Churnet Valley.</p> <p>The Sabrina Way, a section of the National Cycle Network and the Staffordshire Way pass through the area. Alton Towers is the most popular tourist destination in the NCA, together with a number of parks and gardens and pottery visitor centres.</p>
<p>NCA 67 Cannock Chase and Cank Wood</p>	<p>A varied landscape ranging from the open heathlands and plantations of Cannock Chase including the Special Area of Conservation (SAC), through towns, reclaimed mining sites and new developments, to dense urban areas. Extensive coniferous plantations, woodlands and historic parklands occur across the NCA, even within the urban areas where they</p>	<p>A varied landscape ranging from the open heathlands and plantations of Cannock Chase, through towns, reclaimed mining sites and new developments, to dense urban areas.</p> <p>The dominant rounded central plateau is mainly formed of the Coal Measures of the South Staffordshire Coalfield, with other prominent hills in the south at Wren's Nest, Castle Hill, Rowley Hills and Barr Beacon.</p> <p>Extensive coniferous plantations, woodlands and historic parklands occur across the NCA, even within the urban areas where they are predominantly small and include lots of young plantations.</p> <p>Away from the unenclosed landscape of Cannock Chase, fields generally have a regular pattern and are frequently enclosed by mature hedgerows with some hedgerow trees. Here farming is generally mixed with arable cultivation in large fields. Livery is concentrated around the flanks of the Chase.</p>

National Character Area	Summary	Key Characteristics
	<p>are predominantly small and include lots of young plantations.</p>	<p>Heathland and associated acid grassland were once much more extensive, although significant tracts still remain. Post-industrial sites and remnant countryside within the urban areas provide a mosaic of additional valuable habitats.</p> <p>The major rivers of the Trent and Tame lie adjacent to the NCA, both of which lie in broad flood plains. Streams and small rivers such as the Sow and the Penk drain radially from the higher ground into these rivers.</p> <p>The canal network is a notable feature and contributes significantly to the drainage of the urban areas.</p> <p>Industrial archaeology from the industrial revolution is a characteristic feature.</p> <p>The predominant building material of the 19th- and early 20th century buildings is red brick, with more modern structures within the urban areas.</p> <p>The settlement pattern is complex and contrasting, with some areas densely populated and others relatively sparse. The conurbation includes a mosaic of urban areas, former industrial land and patches of farmland, with an extensive urban fringe.</p> <p>The extensive networks of canals and railways reflect the industrial history of the area. Major roads include the M6, the M6 Toll and the A5.</p>

National Character Area	Summary	Key Characteristics
<p>NCA 68 Needwood and South Derbyshire Claylands</p>	<p>Predominately a rolling plateau that slopes from the southern edge of the Peak District to the valley of the River Trent in the south-west. Also in the south are frequent plantations and ancient woodlands of the former Forest of Needwood. Elsewhere, the extensively hedged and pastoral landscape is dominated by mixed farming and features a dispersed pattern of villages and other settlements. Hedgerow trees also contribute to the wooded character of this NCA. Internationally important wetland habitats that include Chartley Moss and Pasturefields Saltmarsh nature reserves occur in</p>	<p>The area, which is dissected by the river systems of the Trent, the Blithe and the Dove, forms a rolling glacial till plateau that slopes south-eastwards from the southern edge of the Peak District to the valley of the River Trent. There is a distinctive scarp to the south of the Dove, whose broad flood plain divides the Staffordshire and Derbyshire elements.</p> <p>The south is dominated by heavy, seasonally waterlogged soils derived from glacial till. In the north, red and pink soils underlain by Mercia Mudstones and Sherwood Sandstone are more amenable to cultivation.</p> <p>A predominantly pastoral landscape of rolling countryside that is still largely rural and relatively tranquil, featuring distinctive field boundary patterns and characteristic hedgerows with hedgerow trees. Grassland for livestock is the dominant land use although dairy and cereal farming are also important. The majority of the farms are small to medium-sized dairying and livestock holdings. Arable cultivation occurs on the better land north and south of the Dove and in the river flood plains.</p> <p>An overall wooded character derived from scattered ancient and seminatural woods, parkland and boundary trees. Some large woodland blocks are prominent in Needwood Forest; however, much consists of smaller, fragmented remnants. There is new woodland creation within The National Forest.</p> <p>Predominantly hedgerow bounded, the field pattern varies from small to medium-sized fields to the north of the Dove; mostly large-scale and rectilinear on the broad river flood plains; strongly rectilinear in Needwood Forest; and smaller and more irregular to the west.</p>

National Character Area	Summary	Key Characteristics
	<p>the west of the area. Part of the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site and The National Forest are situated on the eastern side of the NCA. To the north and west respectively are found small parts of the Peak District National Park and Cannock Chase National Landscape (former Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty).</p>	<p>A wide range of habitats associated predominantly with pasture, varying from damp lowland grassland and marshland to drier neutral grassland. There are good surviving examples of water meadows featured along the three main river valleys. Areas of open water such as Blithfield Reservoir and the major rivers are important for birds. Chartley Moss (a basin mire) and Pasturefields (an inland salt marsh) are internationally important examples of rare habitats.</p> <p>Wood pasture and designed parklands, often with veteran trees, are found throughout the area. They are generally associated with landscape parks and country houses, such as Sandon, Sudbury and Kedleston. Tutbury Castle and the internationally important Derwent Valley Mills, together with a variety of features such as moated sites and medieval settlements and the Trent and Mersey Canal, add to the historical richness of this landscape. Extensive earthworks relating to ridge and furrow and water meadow systems survive, particularly around the Dove.</p> <p>A dispersed historical settlement pattern, particularly in the higher pastoral farmlands that fringe the Peak District to the north, with the older villages generally sited along the valleys or valley sides, and more recent crossroad settlements on the higher ground. Buildings are usually of red brick and clay tile roofs, and local sandstone. Timber frame buildings are rare with notable examples at Somersal Hall and the village of Abbots Bromley. There are market towns at Ashbourne, Stone, Tutbury and Uttoxeter, and the more significant urban areas of Burton-upon-Trent and the City of Derby extend into the eastern boundary of the NCA.</p>

National Character Area	Summary	Key Characteristics
		<p>The Trent and Dove valleys are major transport corridors. The Trent Valley includes the Trent and Mersey Canal, the West Coast Main Line railway and the A51 road, while the Dove Valley features the Derby to Stoke railway line and the A50 road. The A52 links Derby and Ashbourne.</p>

Landscape designations and biodiversity

Landscape designations

There are two areas of designated Green Belt within the Borough. Less than a quarter of the Borough area is identified as Green Belt designation, located to the south east of Stafford as part of the West Midlands Green Belt Area (1,810 ha) and to the north of Stone forming part of the North Staffordshire Green Belt Area (9,266 ha).

The Green Belt area to the north of Stafford Borough acts as a buffer to prevent unrestricted growth of the North Staffordshire conurbation, and to assist in focusing urban regeneration within the conurbation through encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

The Green Belt area to the south east of Stafford Borough supports national objectives by assisting in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. In terms of the national objectives, the Green Belt area to the south and east of Stafford Borough also provides opportunities for access to the open countryside for the urban population, retains and enhances attractive landscapes near to where people live and secures nature conservation interests.

Historic Parks and Gardens

A register of historic parks and gardens is kept by English Heritage. Currently four within Stafford Borough are on the Statutory Register;

- Shugborough (Grade I)
- Trentham Gardens(Grade II*)
- Sandon Park(Grade II); and
- German Military Cemetery on Cannock Chase (Grade II*).

Biodiversity

Within Stafford Borough, approximately 296 ha of land is designated as Ramsar sites and 1,001 ha has Special Area of Conservation (SAC) status, including on Cannock Chase. The Borough has one designated landscape. Cannock Chase was designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1958 because of its beautiful landscape, its wildlife and its history. From November 2023 it has been renamed as a National Landscape.

Cannock Chase is the largest surviving area of lowland heathland in the Midlands. Lowland heath is an internationally scarce and threatened wildlife habitat. The National Landscape also has extensive areas of forest and woodland along with areas of designed parkland, sand and gravel quarrying and mixed agriculture. A large northern section of the National Landscape lies within the Stafford Borough boundary.

Stafford Borough Council along with Natural England and four other local authorities (Cannock Chase Council, Lichfield District Council, South Staffordshire Council and Staffordshire County Council) fund and support the work of the Cannock Chase Natural Landscape Unit and implementation of the Cannock Chase National Landscape Management Plan through the Joint Committee and Officer Working Group. Additional work on specific projects is carried out by a range of National Landscape partners.

Stafford Borough is also a member of the Cannock Chase SAC Partnership comprising Local Authorities, landowners including Staffordshire County Council and advisory bodies such as Natural England and the NL team to develop and deliver a mitigation strategy for the impacts of recreation on the SAC.

The Borough has diverse ecological assets including:

- 16 sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs);
- 3 Ramsar sites (Chartley Moss, Aqualate Mere, and Motte Meadows) which is an international designation of wetlands designated by UNESCO;
- 4 Special Areas of Conservation (SACs);
- 2 National Nature Reserves; and
- 173 sites identified locally as Sites of Biological Importance (SBIs).

Indicators

Indicator	Quantified data (for Stafford Borough unless stated)	Comparators and Targets	Assessment/Trend	Issues Identified?	Action / Issues for Plan / SA
Housing completions on Previously Developed Land (PDL) (percentage) ¹⁷	2024/25: 24%	Average 2011/12 to 2024/25: 39%	Decreasing percentage of housing completions on PDL	Unfavourable condition	Continue to maximise Housing completions on PDL
Woodland access % of population with access to a 2ha+ wood within 500m ¹⁸	2022: 13.59%	England 16%	Performing poorly against regional average.	Unfavourable condition	Need to provide more woodland access

¹⁷ Stafford Borough Council Land for New Homes (2025) [Land for New Homes](#)

¹⁸ Office for National Statistics Census 2021 [Woodland natural capital accounts, UK - Office for National Statistics](#)

Indicator	Quantified data (for Stafford Borough unless stated)	Comparators and Targets	Assessment/Trend	Issues Identified?	Action / Issues for Plan / SA
Travel to work ¹⁹	2022 Car / Van: 35,046 Bicycle: 1300 On foot: 4851	Staffordshire: Car / Van: 240,040 Bicycle: 5,617 On foot: 27,741 West Midlands: Car/Van: 1,396,152 Bicycle: 38,436 On foot: 185,913	Performing well against the County average	Favourable position	Continue to promote more sustainable modes of travel
Percentage of household waste ²⁰	2016 52.4%	England: 43%	Performing well against national average	Favourable position	Maintain / improve current performance

¹⁹ Office for National Statistics Census 2021 [Method used to travel to work - Office for National Statistics](#)

²⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/env18-local-authority-collected-waste-annual-results-tables>

Indicator	Quantified data (for Stafford Borough unless stated)	Comparators and Targets	Assessment/Trend	Issues Identified?	Action / Issues for Plan / SA
Developer contributions to the Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation (SAC) ¹²	2024/25: £1,781,955.56 has been collected and is available to spend post 1 April 2025.	No comparators	No trends	Continue to collect contributions to protect and enhance the SAC	Maintain / improve current performance
Local Sites in positive conservation management ²¹	Stafford Borough (2016) 186	Staffordshire ²² (2025) 2008/09: 30% 2024/25: 58%	Increasing number of SBIs in conservation management	Favourable condition	Continue to increase the number of SBIs in conservation management

²¹ Staffordshire Wildlife Trust. The State of Staffordshire's Nature (2016) [State of Staffs technical report compressed.pdf](#)

²² Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (2026) [Local sites in positive conservation management - GOV.UK](#)

Indicator	Quantified data (for Stafford Borough unless stated)	Comparators and Targets	Assessment/Trend	Issues Identified?	Action / Issues for Plan / SA
Quality of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) ²³	Most recent data available for each site as of May 2017 13 out of 17 SSSIs had 95% of their area in a 'favourable' or 'unfavourable recovering' condition ²⁴	Data Compiled in 2014 14 out of 17 SSSIs had 95% of their area in a 'favourable' or 'unfavourable recovering' condition	Slightly reduction in the number of SSSIs meeting the 95% threshold	Slightly unfavourable condition	Enhance the quality of SSSIs in the Borough

²³ Natural England <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/SiteSearch.aspx>

²⁴ Includes all SSSIs within or partially within the Borough boundary

Indicator	Quantified data (for Stafford Borough unless stated)	Comparators and Targets	Assessment/Trend	Issues Identified?	Action / Issues for Plan / SA
Water quality ²⁵	<p>Trent Valley Staffordshire (2019)</p> <p>41 water bodies: 4 = bad 22 = poor 14 = moderate 1 = good</p> <p>Chemical status for surface waters: Number of water bodies = 41 41 = fail 0 = good</p>	<p>Humber River Basin (2019)²⁶</p> <p>982 water bodies: 27= bad 159= poor 646 = moderate 150 = good</p> <p>Chemical status for surface waters: Number of water bodies = 982 982 = fail 0 = good</p>	<p>Poor ecological status compared to the wider area</p> <p>Chemical status is similar to the wider area</p>	<p>Unfavourable condition</p> <p>Favourable position</p>	<p>Consider ways to enhance the ecological status of waterways in the Borough</p>

²⁵ Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs: Environment Agency [Trent Valley Staffordshire Management Catchment | Catchment Data Explorer](#)

²⁶ Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs: Environment Agency [Humber River Basin District | Catchment Data Explorer](#)

Indicator	Quantified data (for Stafford Borough unless stated)	Comparators and Targets	Assessment/Trend	Issues Identified?	Action / Issues for Plan / SA
Noise complaints ²⁷	2016: 460	2015: 517 2014: 630 2013:740	Number of noise complaints across the Borough are decreasing	Maintain / improve current performance	Continue to address causes of noise pollution
Light pollution complaints ²⁸	2016: 6	2015: 5 2014: 12 2013: 8	The number of light pollution complaints have generally decreased	Maintain / improve current performance	Continue to address causes of light pollution

²⁷ Stafford Borough Council Data

²⁸ Stafford Borough Council Data

7. Key Sustainability Issues and Opportunities

The purpose of the scoping stage is to focus the SA on the sustainability issues which are relevant to the New Local Plan 2025-2045. The assessment will focus on those effects that are likely to be significant, whether positive or negative.

In accordance with Schedule 2 of the SEA Regulations, the SEA must consider the "likely significant effects on the environment, including short, medium, and long-term effects, permanent and temporary effects, positive and negative effects, and secondary, cumulative and synergistic effects".

Through analysis of the baseline data several key sustainability issues for Stafford Borough have been identified to focus the Sustainability Appraisal Framework for the Development Plan. The Sustainability Appraisal Framework is made up of sustainability objectives, indicators and targets tailored to these key issues thus enabling a meaningful assessment of how successful each document has been in addressing these issues and opportunities. Nevertheless, it is recognised in Chapter 5 of this Scoping Report that other Plans, Policies and Programmes may affect the success of each plan document.

Below sets out the key sustainability issues identified for the Stafford Borough area, based on the baseline information gathered for the Sustainability Appraisal process, seen in the Chapter 6. There may be additional sustainability issues, problems and opportunities for the Borough that hasn't been identified through the collection of baseline data.

Social, Health and Wellbeing

Issues

- High levels of deprivation in some areas of the Borough
- High number of empty homes across the Borough
- The Borough has an increasing percentage of elderly people
- A relatively high percentage of the adult population are overweight or obese

Opportunities

- Planned investment in sport and leisure facilities

- Neighbourhood Development Plans offer an opportunity for local communities to become empowered
- Relatively low crime rate

Economic

Issues

- Need to deliver more employment land across the Borough
- Ageing/shrinking workforce - need continued growth in housing and employment sites and in migration of workers.
- Ensure we have the required infrastructure for growth - including broadband

Opportunities

- Growth in advanced manufacturing
- Delivery of Brownfield Register to provide growth opportunities to meet housing demand
- Growth of business parks
- Opportunities for higher value-added companies in growth sectors
- Need to capitalise on the high skills base of Borough residents
- Support needed for Town Centre regeneration and investment

Environmental

Issues

- Loss of biodiversity habitats.
- Loss of individual character for Stafford Borough's settlements.
- Residents have relatively low access to woodland areas
- Decreasing percentage of housing completions on previously developed land
- Fragmentation of habitats can lead to decrease in population since species may be unable to disperse across a disconnected landscape;

- Climate change is likely to alter the condition and character of the landscapes due to increases in annual temperatures and changes in rainfall patterns, which may affect vegetation cover and hydrological regimes.

Opportunities

- Protection and adaptation of heritage assets.
- SAC contributions are an opportunity to protect and enhance Cannock Chase
- Delivery of Brownfield Register to promote the re-use of previously developed land
- Biodiversity Net Gain
- Habitat improvement and creation via opportunities identified in the Nature Recovery Network

8. Sustainability Objectives, Indicators and Targets

Preparing the Sustainability Appraisal Framework involves the development of sustainability objectives, targets and indicators. These elements of the framework are developed from objectives, indicators or targets set out in Plans, Policies and Programmes. Other important sources include expertise within the Local Authority and consultation with key bodies and relevant stakeholders.

As the main purpose of this Sustainability Appraisal process is to assess the policies and proposals in each Plan document against sustainability objectives, the Sustainability Framework is an important factor enabling the description, measurement, analysis and comparison of the effects of the plan. The following topics from the SEA Directive have been incorporated as elements of the framework.

- Biodiversity, fauna and flora;
- Population and human health;
- Water and soil;
- Air;
- Climatic factors;
- Cultural heritage and landscape;

- Material assets;
- Landscape; and
- The interrelationship between these factors.

It should be appreciated that each plan may only have limited scope to influence these SEA Directive topics. Other Plans, Policies and Programmes at European Union and National level will have a more direct effect, e.g. the influence of future Government Aviation Policy on Climatic Factors.

The following sustainability topics and objectives are proposed for the Sustainability Appraisal Framework:

Theme	SA Objectives
Air quality	<p>Take action to reverse the trend for increasing emissions by supporting and enabling the use of low emission technologies and actively encouraging sustainable modes of transport such as walking and cycling, particularly where it is possible to leverage the opportunities presented by new development.</p> <p>Locate and design development so that current and future residents will not regularly be exposed to poor air quality; notably the M6 motorway around Stafford and Clayton.</p>
Biodiversity	<p>Minimise, and avoid where possible, impacts to biodiversity, both within and beyond designated and non-designated sites of national and local significance.</p> <p>Achieve biodiversity net gain including through the long term enhancement and creation of well-connected, functional habitats that are resilient to the effects of climate change.</p>

Theme	SA Objectives
Climate change adaptation	<p>Adapt to current and future flood risk by directing development away from the areas of the Borough at the highest risk of flooding from all sources.</p> <p>Provide sustainable management of current and future flood risk through sensitive and innovative planning, development layout and construction.</p>
Climate change mitigation	<p>Continue to drive down CO₂ emissions from all sources by achieving high standards of energy efficiency in new development, by providing attractive opportunities to travel by sustainable means and by protecting land suitable for renewable and low carbon energy generation, including community schemes.</p>
Economy and employment	<p>Ensure that education and skills provision meet the needs of the Borough's existing and future labour market and improve life chances for all.</p> <p>To create high, stable and equitable levels of employment and competitiveness that recognises social and environmental issues, enhancing the vitality of the Borough's town and villages.</p> <p>Support the needs of the local rural economy.</p> <p>To ensure that sufficient supporting/enabling infrastructure of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth and innovation.</p> <p>Increase the availability of high speed broadband especially in the villages and isolated properties and all new build properties.</p>

Theme	SA Objectives
Health and wellbeing	<p>Improve opportunities for access for all to work, education, health and local services</p> <p>Improve the physical and mental health and wellbeing of Stafford Borough residents, including through enhancing existing health, sports, and leisure facilities and reducing health inequalities between local communities across the Borough.</p> <p>To reduce the impact of noise and light pollution; including potential traffic noise pollution.</p>
Historic environment	<p>Protect, conserve and enhance heritage assets, including their setting and significance, and contribute to the maintenance and enhancement of historic character through design, layout and setting of new development.</p>
Housing	<p>Support timely delivery of an appropriate mix of housing types and tenures, including a focus on maximising the potential from strategic brownfield opportunities, to ensure delivery of high quality, affordable and specialist housing that meets the needs of Stafford Borough's residents, including older people.</p>
Land, soils and waste	<p>Promote the efficient and sustainable use of land and natural resources, including supporting development which makes effective use of previously developed land and avoids the best and most versatile agricultural land where applicable.</p> <p>Support the County objectives for the sustainable management of minerals and waste.</p>

Theme	SA Objectives
Landscape	<p>To protect, enhance and, where necessary, restore the Borough's designated landscape areas and town character, scenic beauty and local distinctiveness, through appropriate design and layout of new development, including the preservation of the Cannock Chase National Landscape and key views.</p>
Population and communities	<p>Sustain and enhance the vitality and viability of Stafford Borough's towns and villages, and their communities through supporting good access to existing and planned services, facilities and community infrastructure, including green infrastructure, for new and existing residents, mindful of the potential for community needs to change over time.</p> <p>Locate development in areas that can support accessibility improvements, reducing deprivation within communities across the Borough.</p> <p>Improve safety within communities throughout the Borough; reducing and preventing crime and reducing the fear of crime</p> <p>Create a sense of community identity, belonging and pride; encouraging community engagement in local issues, and a strong voluntary sector.</p> <p>Ensure tolerance, respect and engagement with people from different cultures, backgrounds and beliefs recognising their rights and responsibilities.</p>

Theme	SA Objectives
Transport	<p>Ensure that the provision of infrastructure is managed and delivered to meet local population and demographic change whilst helping to reduce congestion and travel times. This includes providing infrastructure that maximises accessibility for all and connects new housing developments to employment, education, health and local services, including public realm.</p>
Water resources and water quality	<p>Promote sustainable forms of development which minimises pressure on water resources, water consumption and wastewater flows, including the use of innovative features and techniques where possible, to maintain and enhance water quality of the Borough's rivers and aquifers; consistent with the aims of the Water Framework Directive.</p>

There is an increased focus on monitoring nationally, in light of the proposal to reform plan-making to ensuring a clearer focus on achieving clear ‘outcomes’.

At the current time, it is suggested that monitoring efforts might focus on:

- Employment land requirements - will require close monitoring, given evolving regional and national context. In particular, the needs of the warehousing/distribution sector are subject to change.
- Housing - the Council already monitors numerous housing delivery related matters through the Authority Monitoring Report, and indicators should be kept under review. There is a need to closely monitor affordable housing delivery by sub-area/viability zone across the borough.
- Agricultural land - it is possible to monitor loss of agricultural land by grade.
- Climate change adaptation - potentially monitor housing in close proximity to a fluvial flood zone (in addition to intersecting); also the 1 in 30 year surface water flood zone.
- Climate change mitigation - it could be appropriate to monitor the proportion of new homes linked to a heat network; also the proportion of homes delivered to standards of sustainable design and construction that exceed building regulations. More generally, there is a need to carefully consider how local plan monitoring links to monitoring of borough-wide emissions.
- Water - ongoing consideration should be given to any risk of capacity breaches at Wastewater Treatment Works (WwTWs) and other risks to the status of water courses. Also, there is a need for ongoing consideration of whether the ‘water stressed’ nature of the sub-region, and potentially specific aquifers within the sub-region, is such that there is a need to limit further growth.

9. Next steps in the Sustainability Appraisal process

Consultation

A key aspect of the SA process is consultation. The SA process provides a mechanism to ensure that stakeholder engagement requirements are achieved by providing interested parties/organisations and the public an opportunity to inform the process and comment on decisions taken. Stakeholder engagement also ensures that environmental and social issues, constraints and opportunities are identified and assessed at an early stage of the project.

Public consultation is encouraged as a means by which to help set the environmental context and determine the scope of assessment.

How can I have my say on this consultation document?

Consultation on the new Local Plan 2025-2045: Sustainability Appraisal (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Scoping Report will take place between 8 June and 28 July 2026. Please provide any responses by 12 noon on Tuesday 28 July 2026.

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

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

How will my comments be used?

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

Protecting Your Privacy

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

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

Methodology for preparing the Sustainability Appraisal Reports

Following the Scoping Report stage (Stage A - Scoping) of the SA process, the Sustainability Appraisal Commentary will be prepared to test the objectives for the Development Plan against the SA Framework and to appraise the Proposed Local Plan content and evidence. The Sustainability Appraisal Commentary and the Proposed Local Plan content and evidence will then be consulted upon at the same time, after which a Sustainability Appraisal Report will be published and consulted upon alongside the Proposed Local Plan. Finally, the Council will prepare the submission plan and submit the policy documents alongside the amended Sustainability Appraisal Reports.

The remaining stages of Development Plan Sustainability Appraisal process are as follows:

- Stage B2 - Developing the Options for each plan document
- Stage B3 and B4 - Predicting and Evaluating the Effects of the plan document
- Stage C - Preparing the SA Report
- Stage D - Consulting on the preferred options and the SA Report
- Stage E - Monitoring the significant effects of implementing the Plan document

Stage B2 - Developing and Refining the Plan Options

The Sustainability Appraisal Objectives set out how the key sustainability issues will be addressed, whilst the Plan Objectives will set out what the Development Plan is aiming to achieve in terms of land use and planning policies.

A key element of the Sustainability Appraisal process is to compare the Sustainability Appraisal Objectives with the Plan Objectives to appraise the plan in terms of sustainability and the achievement of targets under SEA target areas. Using the table below the Plan Objectives will be compared to the Sustainability Appraisal Objectives. The purpose of this analysis is to ensure that the Plan Objectives are in accordance with the Sustainability Appraisal Objectives to assist with the development of policy.

Table 2: Example of Appraisal Table

Plan Objective Number	Sustainability Objectives - Economic				
PO1	1	2	3	4	5
	Compatible	Compatible	Compatible	Conflict	Compatible
Comments: Plan Objective 1 is in conflict with Sustainability Objective 4 because					
PO2	Compatible	Compatible	Compatible	Compatible	Compatible
	Sustainability Objectives - Social				
	6	7	8	9	10

The Sustainability Appraisal Commentary will also test the compatibility of the Plan Objectives with each other, using the table below. Where conflicts exist between the various objectives these will be highlighted. Whilst the aim would be to achieve consistency with each other, in practice there will be tensions between Plan Objectives. The purpose of this exercise is to highlight where win-win situations cannot be achieved. Where this occurs decision makers are required to determine where the priorities should lie.

Table 3: Example of Plan Objectives Appraisal Table

	PO1	PO2	PO3	PO4
PO1				
PO2	Compatible			
PO3	Compatible	Compatible		
PO4	Compatible	Conflict	Compatible	

During the preparation of the Proposed Local Plan content and evidence various policies will then be developed in order to meet the Plan Objectives. Each of these policies will be tested through the Sustainability Appraisal Framework to identify the sustainability effects of each policy and to assess its performance in terms of sustainability.

The various policies and alternatives will be appraised against the sustainability objectives to establish whether the effect is positive, negative or uncertain through the short, medium and long-term perspective. For example, will the policy create two jobs or a hundred jobs; will the policy temporarily cause noise pollution whilst buildings are constructed or lead to a more permanent noise infringement. As such, during this Sustainability Commentary stage general differences between the alternatives will be considered and documented. Further details will be duly assessed as the policies are developed and the Plan document's progress through the various stages.

The most effective way of appraising the effects of a policy is by comparing it with a state, an option or an objective. Using the table below refined policies will be compared with the sustainability objectives. This process may also lead to new policies being developed or composed of several different aspects of the policy.

Table 4: Example of Policy and Alternatives Appraisal Process

SA	Policy A			Alternative B			Alternative C		
	S	M	L	S	M	L	S	M	L
1	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	0	-
2	+	+	+	0	-	-	0	-	-
3	+	+	+	-	-	-	0	0	+
4	+	+	+	-	-	-	+	+	+
5	0	0	0	-	-	-	+	+	+
6	+	0	-	+	+	+	+	-	-
7	+	+	+	-	-	-	+	0	-
8	+	+	+	+	0	-	+	+	+
9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
10	+	+	+	-	-	-	+	+	+
11	+	+	+	-	-	-	+	0	-
12	+	+	-	-	-	-	+	0	+
13	+	0	-	0	+	+	+	+	+
14	+	0	-	0	+	+	+	+	+
15	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	0	+
	Policy A			Alternative B			Alternative C		

Comments	Policy A	Alternative B	Alternative C
	<p data-bbox="400 259 675 293">Recommendation</p> <p data-bbox="400 311 1326 344">Policy ** performs best in terms of sustainability objectives etc....</p>		

Where policies could be altered in light of the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) process this will be highlighted in the SA Commentary. The Sustainability Appraisal Commentary will also provide comments on any sustainability issues that arise during the refinement of the policies or during the consultation process.

The developing and refining policies process will form part of the Sustainability Appraisal Commentary, which will be consulted upon at the same time as the Proposed Plan content and evidence. Alongside the appraisal of plan policies the SA Commentary will also compare plan policies against the alternative of 'do nothing' or business as usual. This will highlight what benefits each plan policy could provide.

Stages B3 and B4 - Predicting and evaluating the effects of the plan

The next stage of the Sustainability Appraisal process is to assess, in more detail, each policy in the Proposed Local Plan to determine whether it is likely to have a significant effect on the environment and sustainable development. The objective of this stage is to predict and evaluate the effects of plan policies so that where adverse effects are predicted consideration will be given to what mitigation measures may be required. This will lead to Stage C - preparing the Sustainability Appraisal Report.

Each policy will be assessed using the table set out below, with recommendations for refining the policy included in the process. At this stage it is expected that the predictions regarding the policy impacts may be broad based and qualitative rather than detailed and quantitative if there are limitations in the data that is available. Where possible the potential effects will be quantified, although where this is not possible a subjective judgement will be made.

Table 5: Example of predicted impacts table

Policy 1: [Description]						
SA obj.	Target	Can the effect be quantified?	Effects over time			Comments
			Short term	Medium term	Long term	
Economic objectives						
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
Summary						
Social objectives						
1						
2						

Completion of this process will make it possible to decide if any of the policies are likely to have any adverse impacts. Where adverse impacts are predicted, information will be required on the measures proposed to prevent, reduce or offset these adverse effects. Where an adverse effect cannot be mitigated consideration should be given to deleting or modifying the policy. If a policy does not have any adverse impacts Stafford Borough Council will try and enhance its positive and beneficial effects.

It will also be necessary to assess and record the cumulative effects of all the preferred policy options against the sustainability objectives using the table below. Where there are adverse cumulative impacts, recommendations will be made in the Sustainability Appraisal Report.

Table 6: Example of cumulative effects

Plan Policies	SA Objectives								
	Economic Objectives						Social Objectives		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3
Effects									

Where policies are proposed for alteration in light of the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) process these will be highlighted in the Sustainability Appraisal Report. The SA process will also provide a commentary on any sustainability issues that arise during the refinement of the policy. Conclusions on the overall sustainability effects of the policy will be provided as part of the SA Report.

Furthermore, the Sustainability Appraisal Report will detail the proposals for monitoring the sustainability effects of the plan document, allowing the actual effects of the Plan document to be measured against those predicted in the SA.

The appraisal of the effects of the plan will form part of the Sustainability Appraisal Report, which will be available for consultation at the same time as the Proposed Local Plan.

Following the consultation on the Proposed Local Plan and the Sustainability Appraisal Report the policy development will be used to prepare the policies for inclusion in the Submission Plan to the Secretary of State. At the stage the policies in the Submission document will be assessed through the Sustainability Appraisal Framework and the Sustainability Appraisal Report will be amended to detail this assessment process.

Stage D - Consulting on the Plan and the Sustainability Appraisal Report

The Revised Sustainability Appraisal Report will be submitted to the Secretary of State alongside each Submitted Plan, each of which will be subject to the independent Examination process. The independent Examination will consider whether the Sustainability Appraisal process has been incorporated into the production of submitted plans and whether the requirements of the SEA Directive have been met.

The Environmental Report is a key requirement of the SEA Directive. The Environmental Report documents the whole SEA process and provides a record of how environmental considerations are incorporated into production of the Plan. The elements of the SA process that meet this requirement will be highlighted in a table at the end of the SA Report. The suggested layout of the table is set out below.

Table 7: Environmental Report Table

SEA Requirements for Environmental Report	Location in Sustainability Report
An outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan or programme, and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes	
The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution therefore without implementation of the plan or programme	
The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected	
Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan or programme including those relating to any areas of a particular environmental, <i>economic</i> or <i>social</i> importance, such as areas designated pursuant to Directives 79/409/EEC and 92/43/EEC.	
The environmental protection objectives, established at international, Community or national level, which are relevant to the plan or programme and the way those objectives and any environmental considerations have been considered during its preparation.	
The likely significant effects on the environment, including on issues such as biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the interrelationship between the above factors.	
The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the plan or programme.	

SEA Requirements for Environmental Report	Location in Sustainability Report
An outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with , and a description of how the assessment was undertaken including any difficulties encountered in complying the required information.	
A description of measures envisaged concerning monitoring in accordance with Art. 10.	
A non-technical summary of the information provided under the above headings.	
The report must include the information that may reasonably be required taking into account current knowledge and methods of assessment, the contents and level of detail in the plan or programme, its stage in the decision0making process and the extent to which certain matters are more appropriately assessed at different levels in that process to avoid duplication of the assessment (Art. 5.2)	
Consultation	
Authorities with environmental responsibility, when deciding on the scope and level of detail of the information which must be included in the environmental/sustainability appraisal report (Art 5.4)	
Authorities with environmental, social or economic responsibility and the public, shall be given an early and effective opportunity within appropriate time frames to express their opinion on the draft plan or programme and the accompanying environmental/sustainability appraisal report before the adoption of the plan or programme (Art. 6.1, Art. 6.2)	
Other EU Member States, where the implementation of the plan or programme is likely to have significant effects on the environment of that country (art. 7)	

Taking the environmental / sustainability appraisal report and the results of the consultations into account in decision-making (Art.8)

Provision of information on the decision:

When the plan or programme is adopted, the public and any countries consulted under Art. 7 must be informed and the following made available to those so informed:

- The plan or programme as adopted
- A statement summarising how environmental, social and economic considerations have been integrated into the plan or programme and how the environmental/sustainability appraisal report of Article 5, the opinions expressed pursuant to Article 6 and the results of consultations entered into pursuant to Art.7 have been taken into account in accordance with Art. 8 and the reasons for choosing the plan or programme as adopted, in the light of the other reasonable alternatives dealt with; and
- The measures decided concerning monitoring (Art.9)

Monitoring of the significant environmental, social and economic effects of the plan's or programme's implementation (Art 10.)

Quality assurance: environmental/sustainability appraisal reports should be of a sufficient standard to meet the requirements of the SEA Directive.

Examination of the Plan

Following the independent Examination into each Plan document the Inspector will provide Stafford Borough Council with a Binding Report setting out recommended policy changes. Where necessary a Sustainability Appraisal of any significant policy changes made through the Examination process will be required. The completion of this task will result in a second revised Sustainability Appraisal report being produced.

Stage E - Monitoring the Significant Effects of Implementing the Development Plan

After Stafford Borough Council has received the Inspector's Binding Reports. The Plan can be adopted and published. At this time a statement will be issued summarising how the SA results and consultee's opinions have been taken into account, an explanation of the policy choices made and information concerning the arrangements for monitoring.

Monitoring will allow the actual effects of the Plan document to be tested against those predicted in the Sustainability Appraisal Reports. It will help to ensure that issues, which are identified through the implementation of each Plan document, whether or not they were foreseen, can be identified and future predictions can be made more accurately. The monitoring information will also be used to provide baseline data for future Plan documents and SA Reports and can be found in the Technical Appendix.

10. Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA)

The National Planning Policy Framework provides clear guidance that development should not take place where there is substantial risk of flooding. Paragraph 170 states:

'Inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding should be avoided by directing development away from areas at highest risk (whether existing or future). Where development is necessary in such areas, the development should be made safe for its lifetime without increasing flood risk elsewhere.'

Stafford Borough will appointed consultants to carry out a SFRA. The results of the assessment will be reported in a separate document, information will be drawn on when assessing policy development through the Sustainability Appraisal process.

11. Habitats Regulations Assessment

The purpose of Habitats Regulations Assessment of land use plans is to ensure that protection of the integrity of European Sites is a part of the planning process at a regional and local level. The requirement for Habitats Regulations Assessment of plans or projects is outlined in Article 6 (3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC.

Whilst the Sustainability Appraisal and the Habitats Regulations Assessment are two separate processes each with their own legal requirements, the SA will draw on results and evidence gathered by the Habitats Regulations Assessment process. Where this will contribute towards the assessment of policy and development options reference to the Habitats Regulations Assessment process and related evidence will be reported within the SA documents.

Below is a list of Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) sites within or on the edge of Stafford Borough:

- Cannock Chase
- Chartley Moss

- Pasturefields Salt Marsh
- Cop Mere
- Aqualate Mere
- Mottey Meadows

Glossary

Term	Description
Consultation Body	Authorities which because of their environmental responsibilities are likely to be concerned by effects of implementing plans and programmes and must be consulted at specific stages of the SEA. The Consultation Bodies designated in the SEA regulations are the Historic England, Natural England and the Environment Agency.
Contaminated Land	Land that is polluted by virtue of past industrial and chemical uses or naturally occurring radiation, which makes it unsuitable for development without decontamination taking place to remove potential hazards to occupiers and potential users of the development.
Countryside Character Areas	Areas of distinctive landscape, wildlife and natural features as defined by the Countryside Agency.
Cultural heritage	Places or things that are valued because they give us a sense of the past and of our cultural identity.
Cumulative Effects	These effects can be caused by a number of developments which, individually and in themselves, may have insignificant effects, but together combine to create a significant effect.
DEFRA	Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, responsible for promoting sustainable development, protecting and improving rural, urban, marine and the global environment.
Derelict Land	Land that has been previously developed but has been allowed to fall into disrepair and is no longer used.
Economic Development	The development of the economy of the Council area by the creation of employment opportunities.
Environmental Assets	All environmental assets that provide ecosystem services, e.g. landscape, habitats, pollination, erosion prevention, and the absorption of emissions and pollutants resulting from human activities.
Environmental Capital	The combination of the assets (i.e. the tangible commodities, land, trees, fields, etc.) with the environmental benefits derived from them (leisure opportunities, tranquility, natural habitats etc.)

Term	Description
Environmental Limits	The limit to which an environment or ecosystem can cope with the population, resource exploitation and pollution pressures placed on it. Beyond the environmental limit, there is a risk of causing long-term damage to the health and productivity of an environment.
Environmental Report	A document required by the SEA Directive, as part of an environmental assessment, that identifies, describes and evaluates the likely effects on the environment of implementing a plan or programme.
Fauna	All the animal life of a given place or time.
Flora	All the plant life of a given place or time.
Green Belt	Land designated in development plans to be kept open in accordance with PPG2.
Greenfield Sites	Land that has never been built on, usually grassland, farmland or heath.
Habitat	A site or areas inhabited by wild flora and fauna upon which they are reliant for their continued free existence.
Heritage	Things of value inherited or passed on from generation to generation, qualities which are worthwhile to preserve for prosperity.
Historic Parks and Gardens	Parks or gardens of special historic interest.
Indicator	Measure of variables over time, often used to measure achievement of objectives.
Indirect (Secondary) Effects	Effects which are not a direct result of the plan, often produced away from or as a result of a complex pathway
Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)	Telephone, computing and other technology designed to enable Communications Technology remote working and communication.
Infrastructure	Roads, sewers, drainage and the availability of energy supplies at the most basic level, through to social infrastructure such as schools and community centres.
Listed Building	A building contained in a list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest prepared by the Secretary of State for the Culture, Media and Sport (under Section 1 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990).

Term	Description
Local Nature Reserve	Sites established by the Local Authority which can make a valuable contribution to nature conservation, local wildlife or geological interest, providing opportunities for education and enjoyment at the local level.
Local Transport Plan	Plan prepared by Staffordshire County Council detailing transport priorities and actions to be taken.
Local Need	Anticipated requirements (e.g. for housing) generated by local growth or other (e.g. demographic) trends. This specifically excludes demands generated by inward migration.
Modal Split	The proportion of people traveling by different types of transport.
Mitigate	To alleviate or to moderate a quality or condition that is harmful or unpleasant (e.g. pollution)
Mitigation Measures	Measures designed and intended to reduce adverse environmental effects that cannot be avoided.
National Nature Reserve (NNR)	An area of national / international importance for nature conservation and managed in accordance with a nature reserve agreement.
National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)	The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was introduced in March 2012 to replace previous national planning policy, and has been revised subsequently. The document sets out the government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied.
National Playing Fields Association (NPFA)	A charity where the aim is to acquire, protect and improve playing fields and other recreational space for the community.
Net Gain	The useful and/or positive benefits remaining after all deductions have been made.
Non-statutory Designations	A designation not enacted, created, or regulated by statute.
Objective	A statement of what is intended, specifying the desired direction of change in trends.
Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)	The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) was established to support the NPPF. PPG provides detailed guidance across a number of specific categories.

Term	Description
Precautionary Principle	The assumption that an activity or development might be damaging unless it can be proved otherwise.
Previously Developed Land (PDL)	Housing land that is or was occupied by a permanent structure (excluding agricultural or forestry buildings) and associated fixed surface structures. The definition covers the curtilage of the development.
Public Transport Nodes	Areas that offer greater accessibility by public transport and reduce reliance on the private car.
Ramsar	A wetland site designated under the European Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance.
Reclaim/Re-use	To regenerate, rescue or restore an area to bring it back into use.
Renewable Energy	Energy flows that occur naturally and repeatedly in the environment (e.g. from sun, wind or wave or fall of water). Plant and some waste materials are also potential sources.
Rural Diversification	Engaging in new and different economic activity to strengthen the rural economy and support existing agricultural businesses and farm incomes.
SEA Directive	European Directive 2001/42/EC 'On the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment.'
SEA Regulations	The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations, 2004
Scoping	The process of deciding the scope and level of detail of an SA, including sustainability effects and alternatives which need to be considered, the assessment methods to be used, and the structure and contents of the SA Report.
Special Area of Conservation (SAC)	A European designation for the conservation of sites of international conservation importance, designated under the European Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Fauna and Flora.
Special Needs Housing	A segment of the housing market where a proportion of the housing is targeted or reserved for those people who require special housing requirements. It covers a spectrum of providers and tenures including housing association, joint ventures, public sector and owner occupation.

Term	Description
Sites of Biological Importance (SBIs)	A site of biological importance that is of county importance for its wildlife interest.
Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)	A protected area identified as being of national importance in terms of wildlife, flora, fauna, geological or physiological features. They represent irreplaceable parts of our natural heritage
Special Protection Area (SPA)	A European designation for the protection of wild birds, designated under the European Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds.
Standardised Mortality Ratio (SMR)	Is the ratio of the actual number of deaths one would expect if the population had the same death rate as a standard population?
Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)	A tool for integrating environmental considerations into decision-making by ensuring that significant environmental effects of the decision are taken into account.
Sustainability Appraisal (SA)	Appraisals of plans, strategies and proposals to test them against the four broad objectives set out in the government's sustainable development strategy.
Sustainable Development (SD)	Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Brundtland 1987).
Synergies	The working of two things to produce an effect greater than the sum of their individual effects.
Target	An objective that seeks a specified desired end, stated usually within a specified time-scale.
Unstable Land	Land which by reason of geological conditions or man-made changes, is likely to be subject to movement or collapse, putting at risk life and developments located on or near it.