

Stafford Borough Council

Stafford Economic Growth Strategy

2020 - 2025





Stafford hosts a number of artisan markets across the Borough including those at Stone and Stafford Town Centre.



Foreword

As we enter a new decade, Stafford Borough's economy and population are growing. It is an exciting time for the borough with big opportunities ahead. Together we want to take the initiative to shape and support that growth for the good of everyone who lives, works and studies here, and to attract new investment. Our partnership, and this strategy, will put the right foundations in place for sustained and sustainable growth across the entire borough

We will focus on skills, infrastructure and our identity to ensure Stafford Borough is an attractive place to live, where people enjoy a great quality of life. This requires the construction of quality, well-designed homes, commercially astute, innovative investment to help create excellent employment opportunities, and a skilled workforce able to benefit from and contribute to a growing economy.

These aspirations are already central to four key documents:

- › Stafford Borough Council's Corporate Business Plan,
- › Staffordshire County Council's Strategic Plan
- › Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Local Enterprise Partnership's Strategic Economic Plan
- › Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire Emerging Local Industrial Strategy

Our aspirations and energy will enhance Stafford, a county town with the ambition and capability to deliver a big city economy, as well as Stone, Eccleshall, and our thriving villages. The Partnership wants to drive Stafford Borough forward and reshape our position and reputation in the regional, national and global economy. Homes England also supports the direction of travel that the Partnership is taking.





Award winning Victoria Park in Stafford Town Centre has undergone a £2.5m transformation.



Introduction

We want people to enjoy Stafford Borough - to live, to work, to invest and to flourish. With our connectivity, appetite for growth and ability to make things happen Stafford Borough plays a major role in the economy of Staffordshire and beyond. It has the potential to do more, which in turn must and will benefit its communities.

Destination Stafford

134,800 people call Stafford Borough home with the population set to increase between 2017 and 2027 by 3%. This rate of growth is faster than the England average¹. With over 5,000 businesses delivering over 68,000 jobs, as Staffordshire's largest district, covering around 230 square miles we have great transport links which are already improving and adapting as the Stafford Western Access Route takes shape. An urban extension to Stone and to the north, east and west of Stafford are creating 6,000 new homes and more than 1,200 jobs have been delivered at the £11m Redhill Business Park. With more homes comes greater opportunities for inward investment and demand for education, employment and leisure facilities. The need is clear for a dynamic local enterprise culture and to build on what is already a sustainable and vibrant economy. We want the Borough to offer a choice of high quality, demand driven options to live, work and invest.

Live, Work, Enjoy

Continuing to improve the quality of life of our local residents by developing strong communities that promote health and wellbeing underpins our ambitions for growth. We've delivered a new £10 million leisure centre in Stone and are working in partnership with the Heritage Lottery Fund to restore the landmark Victoria Park back to its former glory.

Building Blocks

To realise the full potential of our area we need to aim for maximum economic productivity and assemble the building blocks of ideas, people, infrastructure, business environment and place² to achieve this. The changing transport network

¹ Stafford: District Data Pack, September 18, Staffordshire Observatory

coursing through our Borough provides the opportunity to move with the changing face of industry to keep the Borough at the forefront of sustainable economic growth and maximise employment opportunities. With a range of successful skills development programmes already up and running, the Borough is already well placed to cope with the changing nature of the workplace. Our strong existing partnership arrangements are built on a shared ambition to deliver our strategy for growth and provide the capacity and resilience to achieve our objectives.

Rural Stafford Borough

Stafford, Stone and Eccleshall are our hub towns for business and enterprise but a significant area of our Borough is rural. In these rural areas investment in Meaford Business Park and Raleigh Hall Industrial Estate demonstrate that we want to support our business sectors to grow and diversify. Agriculture, agri-tech, tourism and the food industry all have a massive role to play in our borough and provide major opportunities for innovation and growth.

Delivering Our Vision

How are we going to get all of this done? Strategic governance is provided by the Stafford Growth, Regeneration and Infrastructure Partnership who will drive progress and scrutinise performance. This strategy doesn't exist in isolation and is closely aligned with the emerging Local Industrial Strategy, the new Local Plan for Stafford Borough and the Stafford Town Centre Strategic Framework. It's also important that this strategy is a live document that responds to changes in the economy, technology and population as it drives forward opportunities for success.

² The Five Foundations of the Government's Industrial Strategy, 2017

The Partnership's Vision

To develop a high value, high skill, innovative and sustainable economy.

As a Partnership we will grow a diverse and balanced business economy to optimise the benefits from our connectivity, opportunities and skills that supports new and existing businesses by working together in a collaborative and flexible way. To deliver this vision the Partnership will focus on:

- 1 Enabling new and existing businesses to grow and build confidence in Stafford Borough as a hub of productivity with a balanced economy
- 2 Leading on the delivery of infrastructure led commercial and housing growth to shape Stafford Borough as the best place to invest
- 3 Understanding and unlocking the economic growth opportunities in our rural areas
- 4 Developing access to learning for all to create a local workforce with specialist skills that can respond to our ambitions for growth
- 5 Taking pride in our County Town status and maximising our visitor offer in the market towns of Stone and Eccleshall and villages across the Borough



The £11 million Redhill Business Park has delivered more than 1200 jobs and is home to multinationals GE, St Gobain and power testing specialist Omicron.

Our success will be measured by tracking the following:

PRIORITY	MEASURE	FREQUENCY	INDICATOR OF SUCCESS
1	Businesses operating within the Borough	Quarterly	Increasing total across the Borough
	Growth priority	Annually	Increasing GVA across all sectors
2	Supply of new homes	Annually	Local Plan housing delivery target met year on year
	Supply of new affordable homes	Annually	Local Plan affordable housing delivery target met year on year
	Supply of employment land	Annually	Local plan employment land delivery target met year on year
3	Rural business growth	Quarterly	Increasing number of rural businesses
4	Education level	Annually	Reducing the percentage of the working age population with no qualifications Increasing the proportion of residents qualified to NVQ Level 3 and above
	Graduate retention	Annually	Increasing number of graduates staying in the borough after education
	Unemployment level	Quarterly	Reduction in the number of working aged people who are unemployed
	Raising skills level	Annually	Increasing number of adults participating in skills training Increasing number of residents progressing into work, education, training or apprenticeships, or being upskilled
5	Town centre health check	Quarterly	Reduction in vacant properties (all uses)
	Visitor numbers - day visits	Annually	Increasing number of day visitors
	Visitor numbers - staying trips	Annually	Increasing number of staying visitors



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Many global organisations have made Stafford Borough their home including, Wacker Neuson, leading the way in developing zero emission machines.



Growth Priority 1

Enabling new and existing businesses to grow and build confidence in Stafford as a hub of productivity with a balanced economy.

Looking to invest in Stafford? What helps businesses to make that decision?

We make it easy with the partnership planning approach that focuses on design, quality and creating a great place to live and our urban and rural economies nurture innovative and smart technologies. Transformational projects like the Stafford Station Gateway look to improve our offer with new hotel and conferencing facilities.

We already cover the spectrum of employment sectors and maintaining a balanced economy with jobs growth remains a key priority for the Partnership. However we need to address the fact on average each hour worked in Staffordshire was nearly a fifth less productive than the national average³.

Stafford is traditionally a large public sector employer, not just local government but across the health and defence services. As with other industries people are likely to experience more than one career during their working life, it's important that we support these moves and retain our skilled workforce locally.

Stafford has been showcased at the international property event MIPIM⁴ where our ambitions have been shared and investment interest is growing. As our proposals take shape so must the way we shout about them and announce that

Stafford is one of the best places in the UK to invest in.

WHAT ARE WE ALREADY DOING?

- › Delivering £6m of access improvements to unlock the 34 hectare Meaford Business Park
- › Offering one-to-one support to businesses looking to relocate to or grow within Stafford Borough, taking an holistic approach to inward investment enquiries which has resulted in 690 additional businesses created since 2011
- › Exploring new options for the existing business support package provided through the Stafford Town Centre

WHAT WILL WE BE DOING NEXT?

- › Launching a business engagement protocol across the partnership to guarantee that our interventions are targeted, co-ordinated, effective and making a difference to productivity
- › Building stronger links with local universities to support business incubation and unlock the right locations for starter units so that the Borough can 'grow our own' innovative businesses
- › Identifying new employment sites through our new local plan and taking early action to support the right businesses into the right locations
- › Working in partnership to deliver an innovative and well connected business district within the Stafford Station Gateway
- › Promoting commercial development opportunities created around the Stafford Western Access Route
- › Using evidence based research to understand the depth of impact of urban enterprise on the Borough's economy to build future capacity

³ Increasing Economic Output (Gross Value Added) and Raising Productivity in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent;

⁴ Staffordshire County Council, April 2018 Le Marché International des Professionnels de l'Immobilier; an international property event



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Partnership working between Stafford and Rural Homes, Housing Plus Group, Stafford Borough Council and Homes England delivered a £1m housing scheme of much needed affordable homes in one of our villages.



Growth Priority 2

Leading on the delivery of infrastructure led commercial and housing growth to shape Stafford Borough as the best place to invest.

Using our connectivity to grow a strong economy

The opening of the Stafford Western Access Route in 2021 will improve connectivity between the west and north of Stafford and the 2022 completion of the Smart Motorway programme between Junctions 16 and 19 of the M6 will reduce congestion and unreliable journey times. 2027 will see High Speed 2 services at Stafford railway station, cutting journey times to London to just 53 minutes. Our prime location makes us a great base for business.

Whilst Superfast Staffordshire has provided 94% of the Borough population with internet speeds of around 25mbps+ over 11,000 of our residents are still waiting on this connectivity. In rural areas robust digital connectivity has the potential to transform the economy.

The housing and business growth that we've seen over the last five years demonstrates how much people want to come and live and work here and our aspiration for a new garden community means there is more work to be done to continue to create the places where people want to live.

We want Stafford to be the place where people choose to set down roots, commuting into rather than away from the Borough. This means delivering more aspirational housing to attract high skilled workers and continue to positively promote the Borough as an area of good quality accommodation across all tenures.



WHAT ARE WE ALREADY DOING?

- › Delivering the £63m Stafford Western Access Road which will unlock major housing growth, relieve congestion and improve journey reliability across Stafford
- › Modelling options with the Department for Transport and Network Rail for a new West Coast Mainline railway station as part of our proposals for a new garden community
- › Promoting the development potential of HS2 in Stafford Borough through the Constellation Partnership Growth Strategy

WHAT WILL WE BE DOING NEXT?

- › Delivering our new Local Plan that provides the framework for future development
- › Refreshing the Borough Infrastructure Delivery Plan to ensure that the right infrastructure is in place to deliver our vision
- › Working in partnership to deliver the Strategic Infrastructure Plan that will consider the cumulative impact of growth and identify major infrastructure requirements needed to deliver sustainable growth
- › Launching a Parking and Movement Strategy for Stafford Borough that responds to growth and changes in technology and supports our ambitions for sustainable travel that will support healthy lifestyles
- › Supporting faster more resilient digital connectivity to add flexibility to the location options for our businesses
- › Making sustained progress on the new garden community proposals and the transformational change that they can realise



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Rural Enterprise Funding helped a farming couple in Aston to transform under-used agricultural buildings into a bakery specialising in savoury pies. Business start ups in the Borough are higher than the Staffordshire average and have the highest rate of business survival.



Growth Priority 3

Understanding and unlocking the economic growth opportunities in our rural areas

Whether you look at our towns or villages the proportion of working age residents is the same. This is mirrored in the rural Borough⁵. So why is it important that we pay particular attention to our rural areas? Because some of the challenges and opportunities there are different. Nearly 4,000 businesses in our Borough are located in the rural areas but issues around digital connectivity, mobile phone coverage and access to skilled labour are more problematic.

There is also a need to understand our rural communities and make sure that a reliance on digital connectivity doesn't increase concerns around social isolation by limiting the amount of interaction people have.

Building sustainable economies means providing affordable rural homes, encouraging tourism and supporting the mix with a better public transport offer.

The countryside isn't just about farming and food production but these continue to be hugely important and we must recognise the volatility of the farming industry. The emerging Local Industrial Strategy will take account of rural economies and their future potential.



5 Staffordshire Rural Economy Evidence Base; Staffordshire County Council, 2015

WHAT ARE WE ALREADY DOING?

- › Working together to deliver a successor funding programme following successful European funding support for rural areas
- › Identifying residential and commercial areas within the Borough that are working with internet speeds of less than 30 mbps
- › Using the new Local Plan process as a mechanism to encourage developers to think about designing in broadband connectivity to new developments

WHAT WILL WE BE DOING NEXT?

- › Developing the support given to Stone and Eccleshall by working together to deliver 'Town Deals'
- › Targeting specific business and planning policy advice and funding opportunities to rural businesses to facilitate business growth
- › Developing employment opportunities for young people in rural areas and wherever possible removing barriers to employment
- › Exploring the feasibility of supporting rural business hubs, clustering complementary goods and services to build strength into the rural economy
- › Promoting 5g connectivity and the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme which can be used by small businesses and communities around them to contribute to the installation cost of a gigabit-capable connection
- › Supporting Staffordshire County Council to identify how its farm estate in the Borough can contribute to unlocking economic growth opportunities in our rural areas.
- › Using evidence based research to understand the depth of impact of rural enterprise on the Borough's economy to build future capacity



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Newcastle and Stafford College Group, the first further education college nationally to achieve 'Outstanding' in all areas of Ofsted's new framework. 2023, will see the construction of a 7,500 sq metre, 3 storey facility, equipped with leading edge equipment and state-of-the-art skills, construction, engineering and motor vehicle facilities, along with a 4 court sports hall, gym and 300-seat auditorium.



Corporate Business Objective 4

Developing access to learning for all to create a local workforce with specialist skills that can respond to our ambitions for growth

Staffordshire is an economic success story with almost full employment, with currently only 1.7% of the working age population claiming benefits. But as the aims and aspirations of our communities change few people will have, or expect, a job for life. Our careers will take many paths and we now need to provide multiple employment pathways to support this way of working, including a choice of more flexible working.

Reflecting the aims of the emerging Local Industrial Strategy, we want sustainable employment offers that promise not just jobs but careers.

We know that Stafford Borough has an ageing population but our economic prosperity relies on a balanced demographic within our workforce. We also need to address the barriers to work faced by our residents with long term health conditions and encourage employment opportunities that support this.

We have ambitions for our Borough that will see the digital sector grow. Our businesses have identified the need to work with schools to encourage young people into skilled industry. It's well documented how successful we are in delivering growth but we need to make sure that our local communities are prepared and ready to benefit from regeneration projects.

To achieve all this we need to build on the strengths of our existing education offer and ensure that we are providing opportunities for lifelong learning to everyone in our Borough so that we're the right place to bring business to and we provide the opportunities to make people want to stay.

WHAT ARE WE ALREADY DOING?

- › Supporting Newcastle and Stafford College Group in its exciting regeneration proposals for the Earl Street campus which will deliver a new £25m Skills and Innovation Centre
- › Commissioning the Careers Enterprise Company to support Staffordshire schools in implementing the national Careers Strategy
- › Supporting New Beacon Group to establish a new university and links to China
- › Working inclusively to tackle health inequalities and provide support into work

WHAT WILL WE BE DOING NEXT?

- › Equipping local people with the skills and flexibility needed to respond to a changing employment market by continuing to access the European Social Fund and further commissioning of Community Learning provision for adults
- › Working with education providers like Staffordshire, Wolverhampton and Keele Universities, Newcastle and Stafford College Group and the New Beacon Group to establish an evening learning environment in Stafford
- › Maximise local job and supply chain opportunities during the construction phase of HS2 and other strategic developments
- › Expanding the activity of the Careers Enterprise Company to develop Careers Hubs linking schools with employers
- › Supporting smaller businesses to get involved in work experience and skills sharing and provide access to workforce development activities for Stafford employers
- › Developing a new model to facilitate and promote the contribution of the over 60s to our local economy and understands the value of volunteering

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The 2021 edition of IRONMAN 70.3 Staffordshire saw a record 2,653 athletes from over 35 different countries enter, making this a sold-out race and showcasing the Borough on the international stage.

Corporate Business Objective 5

Taking pride in our County Town status and maximising our visitor offer in the market towns of Stone and Eccleshall and villages across Stafford Borough

When you hear someone say Stafford what do you think?

Stafford is a beautiful county town with a history of shoemaking. The canal network that runs through Stone and many of our villages is hugely popular. We have railway heritage and a focus on heavy electrical engineering. Stafford Borough is rural and urban, traditional yet always looking forward. Being clear about what Stafford has to offer is fundamental to encouraging significant investment in our Borough.

We know that Stafford already tempts people in for the day with successful events like the County Show or the annual Cheese and Ale Festival that brings in over 72,000 visitors into Stafford town centre. What we need to strengthen is our offer for staying visits and our town centres sit at the heart of this.

Whatever the reason for visiting Stafford the visitor economy contributes towards over 3,000 jobs in our Borough, a figure that is only set to rise. The visitor economy is the sixth largest employment sector in the UK and by supporting local businesses and facilities it helps to create an attractive place for investment.

Ease of movement in and around our town centres is crucial to attracting people in and this is a key theme in our business case for Future High Streets Funding.

Stafford is perfectly placed to enjoy family days out and leisure activities for all, with attractions like Shugborough and theme parks such as Alton Towers and Drayton Manor Park and Zoo are a stone's throw away.

WHAT ARE WE ALREADY DOING?

- › Completing a Strategic Framework for Stafford Town Centre that links existing plans to deliver town centre homes and a quality leisure and culture offer
- › Developing a Future High Streets Fund business case and exploring other funding options for sustainable transformation in Stafford town centre. This work includes options for the Shire Hall.
- › Developing masterplan proposals for the regeneration of the Eastgate area of Stafford into an investible proposition for development
- › Exploring options to improve the public realm in Stafford to deliver a quality environment that will support the town centre
- › Stafford Town Centre Partnership are commissioning a feasibility study to understand the implications of creating a Business Improvement District in Stafford and to assess the viability of the scheme

WHAT WILL WE BE DOING NEXT?

- › Launching a comprehensive Visitor Economy Strategy that develops the Borough's evening economy, our business offer and a programme of events to boost our reputation as a destination Borough
- › Responding to the demand for overnight stays in the Borough as set out in the recently published Staffordshire Hotel and Visitor Accommodation Development Strategy
- › Building Brand Stafford, having a clear marketing strategy and shouting loudly about what the Borough has to offer
- › Expanding work opportunities in the visitor sector through new hotels and conferencing facilities and expanding our cultural offer with innovative new destinations like the Staffordshire History Centre



Home to award-winning gardens, ancient woodland, a unique outdoor shopping village, events galore and 725 acres of natural beauty Trentham Estate is one of many tourist attractions within Stafford Borough.



Appendix



Connected

3 M6 junctions, 2 railways stations
and 4 airports within an hours drive



Skilled

50% of Borough residents are
educated to NVQ Level 4 or above



Focused

17% growth in manufacturing
since 2011, 489 digital businesses



Committed

£100 million investment
in Stafford town centre

INFORMATION SOURCES

- › Office of National Statistics
- › Population Estimates 2017
- › Annual Population Survey
- › Business Register and Employment Survey 2017
- › Interdepartmental Business Register 2018
- › Staffordshire County Council
- › Stafford Locality Profile, January 2018

LINKS TO OTHER STRATEGIES

- › Homes England Strategic Plan 2018/19-2022/23
- › Housing Plus Group Corporate Plan 2018-2023
- › Industrial Strategy White Paper
- › Ladder for Staffordshire
- › Midlands Engine Strategy
- › Stafford Borough Housing Strategy 2015-2019
- › Stafford Borough Climate Change and Green Recovery Strategy
- › Staffordshire Hotel and Visitor Accommodation Development Strategy
- › Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire Strategic Economic Plan (April 2018)
- › Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership Skills Strategy
- › Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire Local Industrial Strategy - Consultation Draft
- › The Constellation Partnership - Delivery Plan and Skills Strategy
- › The Plan for Stafford Borough 2011-2031
- › Green Finance Strategy

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