

Core Policy 1 – The Spatial Strategy for South Staffordshire

The rural regeneration of South Staffordshire will be delivered through the implementation of the following Spatial Strategy. The principal aim will be to meet local needs, whilst recognising the constraints that impact upon the District, and support and improve infrastructure and service delivery in the District.

Throughout the District, growth will be located at the most accessible and sustainable locations in accordance with the Settlement Hierarchy set out below and the Council will work with partners to deliver the infrastructure, facilities and services required to support this growth. An integral part of the Strategy will be to protect, maintain and enhance the natural and historic environment and the local distinctiveness of the District and retain and reinforce the current settlement pattern.

In relation to the District's existing communities and settlements, appropriate proposals which contribute to their improved sustainability, cohesion and community wellbeing, will be supported.

Development proposals will be expected to make efficient use of land and prioritise the use of Previously Developed Land (brownfield land) in sustainable locations, provided it is not of high environmental value, whilst safeguarding the character of existing residential areas.

Main Service Villages

Bilbrook, Brewood, Cheslyn Hay, Codsall, Great Wyrley, Kinver, Penkridge, Perton and Wombourne are defined as **Main Service Villages** and will be the main focus for housing growth, employment development and service provision. Village centres will be the focus for new shopping and small scale office development to maintain their vitality and viability.

Local Service Villages

Coven, Essington, Featherstone, Huntington, Pattingham, Swindon and Wheaton Aston are defined as **Local Service Villages** where limited development will be supported where it meets local needs, whilst recognising the constraints that impact upon the District. Employment development will be limited to that which meets local business and community needs and maintains the vitality and viability of these communities. Shopping and office development will be located in the village centres.

Small Service Villages

Bednall, Bobbington, Bishops Wood, Dunston, Shareshill, and Trysull are defined as **Small Service Villages** where very limited development may be acceptable for the provision of rural affordable housing where it clearly supports a local need and contributes to the sustainability of those local communities. Employment development will be limited to rural employment and diversification which meets local business and community needs.

Other Villages and Hamlets

The villages defined as **Other Villages and Hamlets** are not identified for growth, and development will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances for the provision of rural affordable housing to meet identified local needs. New development in these locations will therefore be limited to rural affordable housing schemes provided through rural exception sites and the conversion and re-use of redundant rural buildings to appropriate uses.

Outside the Service Villages

Outside the service villages, the objective of the Spatial Strategy is to protect the attractive rural character of the countryside where new development will be restricted to particular types of development to meet affordable housing needs, support tourism, provide for sport and recreation and support the local rural economy and rural diversification.

As part of the strategy for employment and economic development, support will continue to be given to the four existing freestanding strategic employment sites (i54, Hilton Cross, ROF Featherstone/Brinsford and Four Ashes).

The Green Belt and Open Countryside

The South Staffordshire portion of the West Midlands Green Belt as defined on the Policies Map, will be protected from inappropriate development and proposals will be considered in the light of other local planning policies and the policy restrictions relating to Green Belt in the NPPF, however the Council will consider favourably sustainable development which accords with this Spatial Strategy.

The general extent of the Green Belt and the area defined as Open Countryside will be protected and maintained for the Plan period but some land will need to be released from the Green Belt and Open Countryside in some locations at the Main and Local Service Villages to deliver the proposed development strategy and enable the sustainable growth of these villages. A partial review of Green Belt boundaries and a review of Major Developed Sites in the Green Belt will be carried out through the Site Allocations DPD.

Delivering the Strategy

The Spatial Strategy will be delivered through the Core Policies and Development Policies. In all cases development should not conflict with the local planning policies, particularly the environmental policies. Development should be designed to be sustainable, seek to enhance the environment, and should provide any necessary mitigating or compensatory measures to address harmful implications.

Explanation

- 6.4 South Staffordshire lies on the edge of the West Midlands Conurbation close to the Major Urban Areas of the Black Country and has its own distinctive character. A key aspect of South Staffordshire's local distinctiveness is based around its ethos and philosophy of being a 'community of communities'. The settlement pattern of South Staffordshire is that of a rural area with many villages of different sizes situated within 27 parishes. There is no single dominant settlement and many of our residents rely on the services provided within towns and cities outside the District to meet some of their 'higher order' needs including hospitals, certain types of retail needs, and certain types of leisure and employment opportunities. This is in part because they are not able to meet their needs locally. Similarly, many of the people who work in and use the facilities of the District, actually live outside it.
- 6.5 The Spatial Strategy for South Staffordshire is to spread development geographically around the District based on a Settlement Hierarchy. The principal aim of the Strategy is to meet local needs whilst recognising the constraints that impact upon the District, and support the retention of existing facilities and services in villages in a sustainable way and where possible improve them. The Settlement Hierarchy classifies villages as Main Service Villages, Local Service Villages and Small Service Villages and the very small villages in the District are classified as Other Villages and Hamlets. The Settlement Hierarchy is shown on the following map.

- 7.3 South Staffordshire is comprised of a variety of landscapes, with historic landscapes, extensive areas of forest, areas of heathland, commons, rivers and water courses. Some landscape character types have suffered losses or degradation, and the District's landscape is affected by change arising from development, mineral working and agriculture. There are a number of initiatives covering part of the District that aim to achieve enhancements to the existing landscape and create valuable new habitats that can play a part in increasing biodiversity value within the District and these include the Forest of Mercia.
- 7.4 There are currently 11 sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in the District including Motte Meadows, Kinver Edge and Highgate Common. Motte Meadows is also a National Nature Reserve and a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) designated under the Habitats Directive. There are also many other Sites of Biological Importance (SBI) across the District of various habitat types that require on-going protection and management including important areas of lowland heathland and ancient woodland. In addition, there are 5 Local Nature Reserves (LNR) in the District including Shoal Hill Common and Wom Brook Walk. The western edge of the Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) lies within the District.
- 7.5 South Staffordshire has a total of 19 conservation areas, most of them based upon historic village centres, which include canal conservation areas covering the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal, Shropshire Union Canal, and the Stourbridge Canal. There are over 850 listed buildings and structures in the District and a range of other buildings and structures of local importance. In addition, there are 23 Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs).

Core Policy 2: Protecting and Enhancing the Natural and Historic Environment

The Council will support development or other initiatives where they protect, conserve and enhance the District's natural and heritage assets including ecological networks internationally, nationally and locally important designations. Particular support will be given to initiatives to improve the natural environment where it is poor and increase the overall biodiversity of the District including the development of green infrastructure links and to improve the historic environment where it is identified as at risk.

Development or initiatives will generally be supported which:

- a) will not have a detrimental impact upon the interests and significance of a natural or heritage asset;
- b) are not contrary to the control of development within internationally, nationally or locally designated areas including the Green Belt and Open Countryside, Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Motte Meadows Special Area of Conservation, and contribute to the conservation and enhancement of the character of the landscape and local distinctiveness;

- c) are consistent with the sustainable management of the asset including the repair and reuse of historic buildings;
- d) protect and improve water and air quality;
- e) provide mitigation or compensatory measures to address any potential harmful implications and supporting enhancement measures.

Development proposals should be consistent with the NPPF, the Supplementary Planning Documents on the Historic Environment and Biodiversity and other local planning policies.

Development proposals should have regard to and support the actions and objectives of the Severn and Humber River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) and also have regard to the River Severn and River Trent Catchment Flood Management Plans (CFMPs).

Explanation

7.6 The Policy should be regarded as a positive policy that will support the protection and enhancement of South Staffordshire's natural and historic environment and reflects the importance attached to the assets in Strategic Objectives 3, 4 and 5. The natural and heritage assets in South Staffordshire can be identified as follows:

- The South Staffordshire portion of the West Midlands Green Belt
- The Open Countryside – its landscape character and appearance;
- The best and most versatile agricultural land;
- The character and setting of villages;
- Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB);
- The Forest of Mercia;
- Statutory and local areas of wildlife and biological importance, including a National Nature Reserve, Sites of Scientific Interest;
- Motte Meadows Special Areas of Conservation (SAC);
- Protected species and their habitats;
- Regionally Important Geological/Geomorphological Sites;
- Ancient and semi-natural woodlands and veteran trees;
- Trees, woodlands and hedgerows;
- Areas of lowland heath;
- Rivers, watercourses and their floodplains, canals and ponds;
- Buildings, structures and areas of townscape, historic and architectural value and their setting – listed buildings, conservation areas, buildings of special local interest;
- Registered parks and gardens of historic interest including historic landscape areas;
- Sites or structures of archaeological importance – Scheduled Ancient Monuments, sites shown on the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR);
- Land of open space, recreational and amenity value;
- The public rights of way network.

- 7.7 Supporting, enhancing and protecting these assets will require the maintenance of strong partnerships with key partners, such as English Heritage, Natural England and the Environment Agency. The policies in the Core Strategy will contribute to the protection and management of the Cannock Chase AONB and contribute towards the aims and objectives of the Forest of Mercia. The Core Strategy will also make a major contribution towards achieving the objectives of the Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan (SBAP).
- 7.8 The approach to the management and protection of the Cannock Chase AONB will be covered in a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). Further Supplementary Planning Documents will be prepared in relation to biodiversity and landscape character and linked to the relevant Core Strategy policies.

Key Evidence

Sustainable Community Strategy 2008 – 2020
South Staffordshire Council Plan –2012 - 2016
Habitats Regulation Assessment Review of the Core Strategy 2010
Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan 2001
Staffordshire Geodiversity Action Plan 2004
Staffordshire Ecological Records
Tree and Woodland Strategy 2010
Open Space Strategy 2009
Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans 2010
Village Design Guide SPD 2009
Buildings of Special Local Interest
Historic Environment Assessment 2011
Cannock Chase AONB Management Plan 2009 - 2014
Evidence Base relating to Cannock Chase SAC and the Appropriate Assessment of Local Authority Core Strategies 2010
Cannock Chase Visitor Impact Mitigation Strategy 2010
Assessment of Physical and Environmental Constraints 2009
Planning for Landscape Change – Staffordshire County Council SPD 1996-2011
Humber River Basin Management Plan 2009
Severn River Basin Management Plan 2009
River Severn Catchment Flood Management Plan 2009
River Trent Catchment Flood Management Plan 2010
Air Quality Updating and Screening Assessment 2009

Delivery and Monitoring

Through Development Policies EQ1, EQ2 ,EQ3 and EQ4

The monitoring arrangements are set out in the Monitoring Framework in Appendix 1.

own survey work, will help to explain how the historic built environment has evolved and to identify buildings for the local list.

- 7.19 This comprehensive evidence base will emerge as a Supplementary Planning Document which encompasses the Historic Environment, identifying the main issues, and will also be used to inform and refresh the Village Design Guide.
- 7.20 In order to ensure that buildings at risk are saved or not degraded further, sometimes 'enabling development' is the only viable option. In this case paragraph (b) of this policy will be used in conjunction with guidance 'Enabling Development and the Conservation of Significant Places' issued by English Heritage in 2008 or subsequent guidance for enabling development.

Key Evidence

Sustainable Community Strategy 2008 - 2020
Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans 2010
Village Design Guide SPD 2009
Buildings of Special Local Interest (on going)
Historic Environment Character Assessment 2011
Assessment of Physical and Environmental Constraints 2009
West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscapes Project 2010

Delivery and Monitoring

Through the Development Management process in consultation with English Heritage, the County Council and other partners
Conservation and Design advice
Conservation Area Management Plans
Village Design Guide SPD (or subsequent revisions)
Historic Environment SPD
LSP Environmental Quality Delivery Plan

The monitoring arrangements are set out in the Monitoring Framework in Appendix 1.

Policy EQ4: Protecting and Enhancing the Character and Appearance of the Landscape

The intrinsic rural character and local distinctiveness of the South Staffordshire landscape should be maintained and where possible enhanced. Trees, veteran trees, woodland, ancient woodland and hedgerows should be protected from damage and retained unless it can be demonstrated that removal is necessary and appropriate mitigation can be achieved. For visual and ecological reasons, new and replacement planting should be of locally native species.

The Council will encourage and support the creation of new woodlands

and the management of existing woodlands particularly where they contribute to community forestry. Reference should be made to the Council's Tree and Woodland Strategy.

Throughout the District, the design and location of new development should take account of the characteristics and sensitivity of the landscape and its surroundings, and not have a detrimental effect on the immediate environment and on any important medium and long distance views.

The siting, scale, and design of new development will need to take full account of the nature and distinctive qualities of the local landscape. The use of techniques, such as landscape character analysis, to establish the local importance and the key features that should be protected and enhanced, will be supported.

Proposals should retain and strengthen the components of landscape character and local distinctiveness, with particular attention to the detailing of any proposal and its relationship with existing buildings, features and vegetation. Proposals within the Historic Landscape Areas (HLA) defined on the Policies Map should have special regard to the desirability of conserving and enhancing the historic landscape character, important landscape features and the setting of the HLA. The County Council's Landscape Character Assessment and Historic Landscape Characterisation will provide an informed framework for the decision making process.

Where possible, opportunities should be taken to add character and distinctiveness through the contribution of new landscape features, particularly to landscapes which have been degraded.

Development within the Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and its setting as shown on the Policies Map will be subject to special scrutiny, in accordance with national policy and any additional guidance, in order to conserve and enhance the landscape, nature conservation and recreation interests of the area.

Proposals that contribute to the objectives of the Cannock Chase AONB Management Plan, the Forest of Mercia and other local initiatives that will contribute to enhancing landscape character will be supported.

Development proposals should be consistent with the adopted Village Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (or subsequent revisions), the Supplementary Planning Documents on Landscape Character and Biodiversity and other local planning policies.

Explanation

- 7.21 The landscape of South Staffordshire is rich and varied and includes part of the Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). It is an important objective of the Core Strategy to protect the character and appearance of the landscape and conserve this heritage for the future. The

NPPF states that the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty should be given to AONBs, and the extent of the Cannock Chase AONB, to which the national policy applies, is shown on the Policies Map.

- 7.22 There are 13 historic parklands and gardens in South Staffordshire, at Chillington, Enville, Four Ashes, Hatherton, Hilton, Himley/Wodehouse, Somerford, Stretton, Teddesley, Patshull, Prestwood, Wergs and Weston. The parklands at Chillington Hall, Enville, and Weston Park are of particularly high quality and have been identified as Grade ii* in the National Register of Historic Parks and Gardens by English Heritage. Patshull Hall and Himley Hall have been identified as Grade ii.
- 7.23 Historic parklands are valuable heritage assets and important to the distinctive rural character of South Staffordshire. They may contain avenues of trees, woodlands, individual veteran trees, areas of wood pasture, lakes and other water features, historic earthworks, moats, hedges, banks and green lanes which are all valuable habitats for wildlife. They also have potential for environmental education and tourism, as well as contributing to the attractiveness of the landscape.
- 7.24 The historic parklands and gardens in South Staffordshire, including those designated as Registered Parks and Gardens have been designated as 'Historic Landscape Areas' (HLAs) to protect them from inappropriate development and management. The principle of the HLAs was first established in the 1996 Local Plan and has been carried forward into the new local planning strategy to ensure that these areas are retained for the future.
- 7.25 The Council will encourage and support the conservation, enhancement and sustainable management of these heritage assets through the preparation of conservation management plans. The Council will work with landowners, English Heritage, the Staffordshire Gardens and Parks Trust, the Garden History Society, Natural England, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust and Staffordshire County Council on matters relating to historic parklands and gardens.
- 7.26 The Policy is consistent with the NPPF. Any development which will have an impact on the landscape should address the intrinsic character of its surroundings, and seek where possible to retain and strengthen the intrinsic character of areas. Landscape character analysis will be an important technique in many circumstances, utilising detailed work already undertaken by Staffordshire County Council in the Supplementary Planning Document 'Planning for Landscape Change' and work on historic landscape characterisation. More detailed guidance on landscape character will be included in a Supplementary Planning Document.

Key Evidence

Sustainable Community Strategy 2008 - 2020
Planning for Landscape Change – Staffordshire County Council SPG 1996-2011

Policy GB1: Development in the Green Belt

Within the South Staffordshire portion of the West Midlands Green Belt as defined on the Policies Map, development acceptable within the terms of national planning policy set out in the NPPF will normally be permitted where the proposed development is for either:

- A.** A new or extended building, provided it is for:
- a) purposes directly related to agriculture or forestry; or
 - b) appropriate small-scale facilities for outdoor sport or recreation, nature conservation, cemeteries and for other uses of land which preserve the openness of the Green Belt and which do not conflict with its purposes; or
 - c) affordable housing where there is a proven local need in accordance with Policy H2; or
 - d) limited infilling* and limited extension(s), alteration or replacement of an existing building where the extension(s) or alterations are not disproportionate to the size of the original building, and in the case of a replacement building the new building is not materially larger than the building it replaces. Guidance in these matters will be contained in the Green Belt and Open Countryside Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).
- B.** The re-use of a building provided that:
- e) the proposed use of any building (taking into account the size of any extensions, rebuilding or required alterations), would not harm the openness of the Green Belt or the fulfilment of its purposes.
- C.** Changes of Use of Land:
- f) the carrying out of engineering or other operations, or the making of a material change of use of land, where the works or use proposed would have no material effect on the openness of the Green Belt, or the fulfilment of its purposes.
- D.** Development brought forward under a Community Right to Build Order.

Development proposals should be consistent with other local planning policies.

**Footnote: Limited infilling is defined as the filling of small gaps (1 or 2 buildings) within a built up frontage of development which would not exceed the height of the existing buildings, not lead to a major increase in the developed proportion of the site, or have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it.*