



Local Plan Review Preferred Options

Frequently Asked Questions

Key Facts

- **The Preferred Options plan will be published for consultation on 1 November 2021.**
- **New sites for housing, employment and Gypsy and Traveller pitches will be set out in the Preferred Options.**
- **There will be a statutory 6 week period of public consultation when you will be able to make your views known. Comments should be made by 5pm on Monday 13 December 2021.**

What is a Local Plan?

Every local planning authority must produce a Local Plan which sets out the planning framework for their area. It contains the amount of housing and employment growth being planned for in the next few years and where that growth will be located. It also contains policies which will be used to decide planning applications. The policies cover many topics from Green Belt, housing, employment, and open space to design, historic buildings and environmental issues. The Local Plan is just that, local to the area it covers, so the policies in our Local Plan will be tailored to South Staffordshire.

Why are we reviewing our current Local Plan?

All councils have to review their Local Plans at least every 5 years to take on board updated information, particularly about the number of homes needed and we committed to begin this review as part of the Site Allocations document (SAD). The Government is pressing all planning authorities to make good progress with Local Plans, in advance of possible reforms to the planning system, and we need to have ours in place by 2023.

What stage is the Review at?

We carried out an Issues and Options consultation in 2018 and a Spatial Housing Strategy consultation in 2019. We asked for views on the planning issues facing us and what options we could consider, including our preferred approach. This next stage is Preferred Options which sets out the most suitable sites for new housing and employment, based on the planning evidence we have collected.



What is the Council's Preferred Approach?

We are looking first to use land already earmarked for development in our Site Allocations document (SAD) with new growth in villages with the most facilities and services and where there are infrastructure opportunities. With additional development through urban extensions along the border with the Black Country we can provide new homes for South Staffordshire and for our neighbouring authorities, under our legal Duty to Cooperate (see below). We will take account of the impact of development on current infrastructure and explore what opportunities there are for new and improved infrastructure. This approach will, however, lead to Green Belt release and this is something that has been very carefully considered in formulating the options. We will look at brownfield options first, but there is very little available brownfield land in South Staffordshire. We know there are very difficult decisions to be made in providing new homes and protecting the Green Belt as much as we can.

Why do we have to help other Councils out?

All councils must meet a legal test known as Duty to Cooperate. This means we have to engage 'constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis' with our neighbouring authorities over matters which cut across administrative boundaries. South Staffordshire already relies on Wolverhampton and other Black Country councils for shopping, hospitals, higher education and some leisure facilities. We must have looked at ways in which we can help in order to meet our legal duties.

Is 'no development' an option?

The simple answer is no. The Government is clear that housing growth is fundamental to revitalising the economy and the thrust of national planning guidance (NPPF) is to 'boost significantly the supply of housing'. The need for housing is not just a national issue, but a local one too. If we don't plan to deliver this growth ourselves, we will lose significant control over where it might go.

What evidence is used to guide development?

Preparing a Local Plan is not a simple process. The Plan is supported by a robust **Evidence Base** which will look at sustainability, the importance of the historic and natural environment, protecting and enhancing our landscapes, access to jobs and services and many other issues, including impact on the Green Belt. Our evidence is published at each stage of the process so that you can see how the Plan is being developed.

Green Belt and Landscape Studies

We have asked consultants to look at what impact development might have on our Green Belt and the landscape of the district. The studies have been published and will help us to see where the most sensitive areas of landscape in the district are and which areas of Green Belt would be most affected by development.

Are Green Belt and Greenfield the same?

No, greenfield sites are those which have not previously been built on, or where previous development has blended back into the landscape. Brownfield land is previously developed land, although this excludes agricultural buildings. Green Belt is a planning, not environmental, designation and the Green Belt can include land that is both greenfield and brownfield.



Why isn't Green Belt land protected from new development?

The Council is committed to the protection of the Green Belt, and we know there are very difficult decisions to be made when we are looking for new sites. The Government is clear in national policy that Green Belt boundaries may need to be reviewed through the Local Plan. The Inspector who carried out the Examination into the SAD asked us to review our Green Belt capacity and we have looked at all non-Green Belt options, but our preferred approach means that some land will have to be taken out of the Green Belt. We will have to show the Inspector, who decides if the Plan is sound, the reasons why we have chosen to release some Green Belt land.

How much Green Belt will be released?

Sites being proposed to be released from the Green Belt in the Preferred Options amount to around 1.4% of the total Green Belt in the district. Of this, just over half is due to West Midlands Interchange (WMI), a strategic rail freight interchange that was consented at a national level by the Government in 2020. This means that **0.72%** of Green Belt is proposed to be released for housing.

Climate Change

The Local Plan will contain policies which aim to achieve 31% carbon reduction, prior to the Government's Future Homes standards coming into effect, with commercial development reaching excellent or outstanding standards. It will also require electric charging points on new homes and 10% biodiversity net gain on major sites through good design principles.

Consultation

The Preferred Options consultation is carried out under formal planning regulations. There is a 6 week public consultation period for comments to be made. Comments must be made in writing between 1 November and 5pm on 13 December 2021. **Comments made before or after these dates will not be considered.** The responses to the formal consultation will be used to inform the next stage of plan preparation. We also welcome comments on the supporting evidence accompanying the Preferred Options plan.

Discussing the Options

There will be opportunities to discuss the Preferred Options with the Local Plans Team throughout the consultation period. Following the success of parish Q&A sessions, we will be holding 5 separate Locality online events where officers will explain the proposals and you will be able to submit questions for the team to answer. We will also be holding face to face sessions at the Council Offices and in the 5 localities (by appointment to ensure Covid safety), plus online appointments via Teams and telephone. Details of how to participate will be published online.

Preferred Options Public Engagement

New Consultation System

We have a new consultation system in place which will enable you to make your comments direct. You will be able to manage your account and response and see details of other responses when they are published. It's very simple, all you need is your email address to register.

Go to <https://sstaffs.oc2.uk/login>

If you made comments on previous consultations and we have your email address, it will already be on the system. Just put your email address in the Login and click 'I forgot my password'. You will then be sent an email and you can set your own password and start making comments as soon as the consultation is live.

Stay Informed

We will keep our website and Facebook page updated with details of the consultation. We will write to everyone who has made comments previously, or who has registered on our database, to let them know about the consultation, where to find the documents and how to submit a response.

Next Steps

Once the consultation has ended, we will read all comments made and use the information to finalise the plan. It may be that because of comments made, or new evidence, or a change in national policy or guidance, that changes will be made to the Preferred Options. The next stage will be a Publication Plan which will also be published for consultation in 2022.

All the information on the Local Plan review to date and the supporting documents are available online at www.sstaffs.gov.uk/localplanreview

Call for Sites

If you have land you wish to be considered in the review of the Local Plan, please let us have brief details and a location plan localplans@sstaffs.gov.uk



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