

# **SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATION**

## **Duty to Cooperate Consultation**

### **Response from Walsall Council (STA24-049-01)**

Prior to the decision in October 2022 to cease work on the Black Country Plan, engagement between the Black Country authorities and their neighbours was traditionally carried out jointly. Engagement with South Staffordshire was led by Wolverhampton.

Walsall has never had bilateral discussions with South Staffordshire either prior to or after October 2022. Meetings have only taken place jointly with the other Black Country authorities or through the Development Needs Group. We can confirm that document SST/ED32A and the appendices appear to be an accurate record of those meetings with which Walsall officers were involved, to the extent that we have contemporaneous notes. Due to the limited time available, and other urgent time pressures including work on Walsall's own local plan, it has not been possible to cross-check the document and appendices in detail. Some of Walsall's records may no longer exist, particularly as the earlier meetings would have been attended by officers who are no longer employed by the council.

Discussions will have comprised a mixture of meetings and email exchanges. Records of meetings, which in some cases included the provision of verbal updates, are not verbatim and drafts of any agreements will have had only limited weight until formally authorised through the constitutional processes of the respective authorities.

Walsall's formal response to the South Staffordshire local plan remains as set out in our response to the regulation 19 consultation (letter dated 12 August 2024), the signed SoCG dated 6 November 2024 and our hearing statement in respect of matter 4, issue 1. This was (and remains) that SSC have capacity to make a higher contribution but we recognise that their proposed reduced contribution is in line with the December 2023 NPPF under which the plan is being examined. The reduced contribution is however in our view a matter of soundness rather than representing a failure of the legal DtC, and this is why we were prepared to sign the SoCG which set out our areas of disagreement.