

# Stafford Borough New Local Plan 2025-2045

## Scoping and Participation Consultation Response by question list from Sandon and Burston Parish Council

### Overall position

Sandon and Burston Parish Council supports the preparation of a Local Plan that enables Stafford Borough to be prosperous, safe and thriving, while giving proper recognition to the needs of rural communities. The Parish Council is not opposed to appropriate development, but development must be genuinely planned with infrastructure, services, transport, green space, nature recovery and heritage protection from the outset. Sandon and Burston is a rural, historic parish with a distinctive landscape setting, listed buildings, conservation interests, limited local services and no local bus service; these realities must shape decisions about growth. The Plan should protect what is irreplaceable, especially village character, green spaces, biodiversity, heritage assets, local views and the quality of life of existing communities.

## Responses by question

### Local Plan Vision

#### 1. Question: What would you like this borough to be like in the future?

**Response:** Sandon and Burston Parish Council would like Stafford Borough to be recognised for its prosperous, safe and thriving local and rural communities. The Borough should be proud of its heritage and actively protect the villages, landscapes, green spaces and historic places that give it its distinctive character. Local infrastructure and services, including housing, transport, health and education, must properly support rural communities rather than being planned after development has taken place. For Sandon and Burston, the future Borough should be one where carefully planned growth is possible, but where the rural setting, community identity, nature, heritage and quality of life are not gradually eroded.

#### 2. Question: What do you think we should change and how?

**Response:** The Borough needs to change the way growth and infrastructure are planned, so that roads, transport, schools, health services, drainage, green infrastructure and community facilities are addressed before housing is approved rather than afterwards. Road safety must be a stronger priority, particularly reducing speeds on roads through rural communities and introducing measures that protect residents, pedestrians, cyclists and the local environment. Communications between borough planning, parish councils and local communities should be improved so that local knowledge is captured early and not treated as an afterthought. The Local Plan should also make clearer how its themes fit together, because housing, transport, health, heritage, biodiversity and infrastructure cannot be planned separately in rural areas.

#### 3. Question: What would you change in your local neighbourhood or area to make it a better place to live?

**Response:** In Sandon and Burston, the most immediate improvements would be safer roads, reduced traffic speeds, better pavements and the provision of realistic rural transport options. The parish has no bus service, which leaves residents dependent on cars and makes it harder for those without access to a car to reach work, education, health services, shops and social opportunities. Safe walking and cycling routes are also needed, but they must be designed sympathetically so that they improve connectivity without urbanising the rural character of the parish. The village setting, green spaces, nature, conservation areas and listed buildings should be protected so that local improvements strengthen the community rather than change its identity.

## What should we be considering?

### 4. Question: What matters or issues should be looked at by the new Local Plan?

**Response:** The Local Plan should look at the specific needs of small rural communities and make those needs visible in the evidence base and policy wording. For Sandon and Burston, key issues include poor transport provision, speeding, road safety, lack of pavements, pavement upkeep, safe cycle routes, pressure from housing sites, local service capacity, green space, biodiversity, heritage and the protection of village character. The Plan should also consider how development can be supported only where infrastructure and services are sufficient, deliverable and funded. The outline investment needed to deliver the Plan should be clearly articulated, because aspirations around healthy communities, sustainable transport and infrastructure-led growth will not be credible unless the means of delivery are understood.

### 5. Question: Why are these matters or issues important?

**Response:** These matters are important because rural communities need to be respected and protected, not treated as spare capacity for development. Sandon and Burston has a distinctive historic and landscape setting, including listed buildings, conservation interests, countryside views, green spaces and a settlement pattern shaped by the A51, canal, railway and surrounding estate landscape. Small or isolated development projects can, over time, have a cumulative effect that damages the very character the Borough should be seeking to protect.

## Theme 1: Addressing Climate Emergency

### Question: What do we need to do in response to climate change and the climate emergency?

**Response:** Climate change should be built into every planning decision, with each significant proposal expected to demonstrate how it contributes to net zero, resilience and nature recovery. In rural areas, this must include honest recognition that residents often rely on cars because public transport and safe active travel options are not available. The Plan should therefore support rural bus provision, safe walking and cycling links, electric vehicle infrastructure, sustainable drainage, protection of mature trees and hedgerows, and the retention of green spaces that support biodiversity and climate resilience. Climate policy should not be separate from housing, transport and infrastructure policy; it should be a test applied across the whole Plan.

## Theme 2: Design, Healthy Lifestyles and Safe Communities

### Question: How can we make our communities healthier, provide better facilities and support high quality design in new development?

**Response:** Communities will be healthier and safer where development is planned with local facilities, safe movement and community input from the outset. In Sandon and Burston, better pavements, safer crossing points, reduced traffic speeds and realistic walking and cycling routes would make a practical difference to everyday life. Local community representation should be strengthened in planning and design decisions, because residents and parish councils understand the lived reality of road safety, access to services, community facilities and village character.

## Theme 3: Nature Recovery and Biodiversity

### Question: What is required to protect our high-quality environments and help to deliver nature recovery?

**Response:** The Plan should give stronger protection to green spaces, green belt where relevant, habitats, ancient woodland, hedgerows, watercourses, mature trees and the wider ecological networks that support rural biodiversity. There needs to be a better understanding of local environmental risks and stronger mechanisms for responding when issues begin to emerge, including early action on drainage, flooding, habitat loss and landscape harm. Local knowledge should be given proper weight, because parish councils and residents often identify environmental risks before they become visible in formal assessments. Nature recovery should be

planned positively through connected habitats and long-term management, not treated as a narrow mitigation exercise attached to individual developments.

## Theme 4: Protecting Landscapes, Townscapes and Heritage

### Question: How can we protect our unique heritage, natural and town landscapes?

**Response:** The Local Plan should actively protect rural villages and smaller settlements, because they contain much of the Borough's most important historical, architectural and landscape heritage. Sandon and Burston has a unique setting, with listed buildings, conservation interests, historic landscape features, the Trent Valley, the Trent and Mersey Canal corridor and countryside views that should be respected. Protection should include not only individual buildings but also their setting, key views, approaches, lanes, open spaces, trees, boundaries and the pattern of development around them. The Plan should guard against the gradual erosion of these places through smaller isolated development projects that may appear limited individually but collectively change the character of the parish.

### Question: What aspects of the borough's heritage matter most to you, how it can be protected, and how it should shape sustainable development into the future?

**Response:** For Sandon and Burston, the heritage that matters most is the combined character of village, countryside, estate landscape, churches and chapels, listed buildings, canal corridor, traditional lanes, views and green spaces. These elements are important because they create a living rural parish with a strong sense of place, not simply a collection of separate heritage assets. Sustainable development should be shaped by this context, with robust protection for conservation criteria, landscape setting, key views, biodiversity and village character. The re-use or sensitive development of redundant or disused buildings may be appropriate where it clearly meets local requirements or housing needs and demonstrably enhances, rather than harms, the natural and historic setting.

## Theme 5: Transport and Connectivity

### Question: Do you find it easy to move around freely and get to where you want to go?

**Response:** No. Movement in Sandon and Burston is difficult for those without access to a car, and rural transport services need to be available, reliable and frequent enough for communities to make genuine use of them. Limited or infrequent services are often inadequate in practice, and the parish's published visitor information states that there are no bus services in Sandon and Burston. Road safety is also a major concern, particularly speeding through rural communities, inadequate pavements and the lack of safe continuous walking and cycling routes. The Plan should also recognise that road closures and highway disruption linked to development can have a disproportionate effect in rural areas, so maintaining safe traffic flow on existing highways should be considered before development-related closures or diversions are agreed.

## Theme 6: Right Infrastructure in the Right Places

### Question: What new infrastructure, services and facilities do we need to plan for and where?

**Response:** The Plan needs to align housing, infrastructure, services and facilities much more clearly, because investment often appears to lag behind development and this creates pressure on already stretched local services. In Sandon and Burston, the priority infrastructure includes safer roads, traffic-calming, better pavements, maintained footways, cycle links, public transport connections, drainage, green infrastructure, biodiversity improvements and protection of open spaces. Place-based plans should identify what each community needs before development is permitted, and should explain how that infrastructure will be funded and delivered. Infrastructure should be sufficient and appropriate to the scale and location of development, rather than relying on existing rural communities to absorb impacts they are not equipped to manage.

## Theme 7: Meeting our Housing Needs and Delivering the Right Types of Housing

### Question: What type of homes do need and where do we need them?

**Response:** Stafford Borough needs homes that meet genuine local needs, including affordable homes for families with good access to services, employment and transport. In rural parishes such as Sandon and Burston, housing should be located where there are sufficient services and infrastructure to support them, so that any additional housing can be served safely and sustainably, without placing unacceptable pressure on rural roads, pavements, drainage, green spaces, heritage settings or village character. New homes should strengthen existing communities rather than create car-dependent development that is disconnected from services and infrastructure.

### Question: Do you think it is better to deliver housing in one go or phased, so that new facilities and infrastructure can be provided?

**Response:** Where development is appropriate, housing should be phased so that infrastructure and facilities are delivered before or alongside it and not after local pressures have already been created. The Plan should make clear what roads, transport, drainage, health, education, green space, nature recovery and community infrastructure are needed before or at each stage of development. This is particularly important in rural communities, where even relatively modest growth can have a significant impact if services and highways are already constrained. Phasing should be used to ensure that development remains manageable, locally responsive and genuinely infrastructure-led.

### Question: Should we have smaller sites so the new housing can be accommodated within the existing community?

**Response:** No. Smaller sites are not automatically better simply because they appear easier to accommodate. In rural parishes such as Sandon and Burston, the assumption that new housing, even when limited in number, can simply be absorbed into existing communities is unrealistic where transport, health, education, retail and other services are already limited or non-existent. Smaller or isolated housing still place unacceptable pressure on rural roads, pavements, heritage settings, drainage, green spaces and village character, and cumulatively erode the setting of the parish.

## Theme 8: Securing Economic Prosperity

### Question: How do we attract more investment and jobs into the Borough?

**Response:** Stafford is well placed geographically to attract investment and jobs, and existing employment linked to education, health, public services and major private-sector employers should be supported. The Borough should also recognise that access to skills is a key factor in future prosperity, particularly in areas such as engineering, green energy, environmental technologies and other sectors that can support sustainable growth. For rural communities, economic prosperity also depends on transport, digital connectivity and access to nearby employment centres. Investment should be encouraged in a way that supports the Borough's economy while protecting the rural landscapes, heritage and village character that significantly contribute to the area's long-term attractiveness.

## Consultation Documents

### Question: Do you agree with the Scoping the Issues and Early Participation document and the approach we have taken?

**Response:** The Parish Council broadly welcomes the Scoping the Issues and Early Participation document and supports the intention to engage early on the future direction of the Borough. The document identifies important themes, including climate, infrastructure, transport, housing, heritage, the environment and economic prosperity, and these are all relevant to Sandon and Burston. However, the approach needs to give clearer and more explicit recognition to the needs of small rural communities, where the cumulative impact of development

can be significant even when individual proposals appear modest. The Plan should make a stronger commitment to infrastructure-first planning, meaningful parish-level engagement and protection of rural character, green space, biodiversity and heritage.

**Question: Is there anything you think is missing from the document?**

**Response:** The document would be strengthened by clearer recognition that rural communities face different issues from larger towns, particularly around limited public transport, car dependency, road safety, pavement provision, access to services and the cumulative effect of small developments. It should say more about how infrastructure will be planned, funded and delivered before or alongside housing, rather than leaving communities to absorb impacts later. It should also give greater emphasis to the protection of village character, conservation areas, listed buildings, key views, green spaces, ancient woodland, biodiversity and the setting of rural villages. The Parish Council would also welcome clearer explanation of how local knowledge from parish councils and residents will be used in the evidence base and in future decisions.

**Question: Do you agree with the Communication and Engagement Strategy and the approach we have taken?**

**Response:** The Parish Council agrees with the principle of a Communication and Engagement Strategy and supports early engagement with communities, residents, businesses and local organisations. However, effective engagement in rural communities must be local, practical and accessible, rather than relying mainly on borough-wide documents or online processes. Parish councils should be treated as key partners because they understand the everyday impacts of development, transport limitations, road safety, access to services, heritage and local environmental issues. The Strategy should ensure that rural voices are heard early enough to influence the Plan, not only invited to comment once proposals are substantially formed.

**Question: Is there anything you think is missing from the document?**

**Response:** The Communication and Engagement Strategy should include a stronger commitment to parish-level engagement, with clear routes for parish councils and residents to feed in local evidence. It should recognise that some residents may find online engagement difficult, including older residents, people without reliable digital access and those who are less able to travel to formal consultation events. The Strategy should also describe how feedback will be reported back to communities, so residents can see how their input has been understood and used. For rural areas such as Sandon and Burston, engagement should specifically seek views on transport, pavements, speeding, access to services, protecting rural heritage, green space, landscape and the cumulative impact of development.

**Question: Do you agree with the Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment Scoping Report and the approach we have taken?**

**Response:** The Parish Council supports the principle of using the Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment process to test the environmental, social and economic effects of the emerging Plan. This process should be robust enough to identify impacts on rural communities, not only borough-wide or strategic impacts. For Sandon and Burston, sustainability must include the protection of green spaces, biodiversity, ancient woodland, countryside views, heritage assets, conservation interests, rural road safety and access to services. The assessment should also consider whether development would increase car dependency in places where there is no realistic public transport alternative.

**Question: Is there anything you think is missing from the document?**

**Response:** The Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment work should give greater weight to the lived experience of rural places and the cumulative effect of incremental development. It should assess impacts on village character, heritage setting, key views, tranquility, green infrastructure, biodiversity networks, drainage, road safety, pavements and access to services. It should also consider whether proposed growth would be genuinely sustainable in communities with no bus service or limited safe walking and cycling

routes. Local environmental knowledge should be actively incorporated, because parish councils and residents often understand site-specific risks and sensitivities that may not be obvious from strategic evidence alone.

## Engagement

**Question:** Are there any community groups or local groups you think we should be talking to? If so, please provide details.

**Response:** Stafford Borough Council should continue to engage with Sandon and Burston Parish Council and should ensure that small rural communities have a clear voice throughout the Local Plan process. Engagement should include residents, local churches, community groups, landowners, local businesses, environmental and heritage groups, public transport providers, walking and cycling interests, and Staffordshire County Council highways and transport teams. The Council should also seek views from people who may be less able to attend formal events, including older residents, younger people, those without a car and those most affected by poor pavements or limited transport. Rural engagement should be early, local and practical, because parish-level knowledge is essential to understanding how planning choices affect everyday life.