

# Staffordshire's Net Zero Planning Policy

## Commitments

Cabinet Member for Visitor Economy, Ecology and Climate Change and Cabinet Member for Housing and the Local Plan



Lichfield  
District Council

Date:	8 <sup>th</sup> October 2024
Agenda Item:	4
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Key Decision?	No.
Local Ward Members	All wards.

**Cabinet**

## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 In January 2024, the Staffordshire Sustainability Board (SSB) received a presentation outlining the climate emergency and emphasised the importance that local planning policies have in delivering sustainable development. **Appendix A** provides the broad policy directions which have been put forward by SSB following this presentation. Staffordshire County Council has asked that each district reviews these policy themes and endorse them as informing the basis of future planning policies in their respective districts or boroughs.
- 1.2 The policies covering topics such as achieving carbon neutrality, delivering sustainable housing and development, and extending tree cover, would help us achieve the goals that we have committed to in our Lichfield District 2050 strategy of achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050. However, this will need to be balanced against making requirements too stringent and discouraging development. Viability testing will therefore be crucial to ensure that inclusion in our local plan policies would not render development unviable, which could result in other obligations for example affordable housing being reduced. As such this paper is recommending that we explore the policy directions as part of the development of policies in our new local plan.

## 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To discuss and provide feedback on the broad policy directions in Staffordshire County Council's Net Zero planning policy document at **Appendix A** ahead of the Staffordshire Leader's Board on 7th November 2024.
- 2.2 To agree that the council signs **Appendix A** as our commitment to **explore** the policy directions in the development of policies in our new local plan.

## 3. Background

- 3.1 In January 2024, members of the SSB received a report and presentation from Annette Roberts (Corporate Director, South Staffordshire Council – Infrastructure and Business Growth) on the Staffordshire-wide agreement on climate planning policies. The presentation outlined the climate

emergency and why it was important for local plans to contain policies which encourage new developments to incorporate green technologies into their designs. The evidence to date, compiled from the Staffordshire Climate Change Study 2020, showed the following would help address the climate emergency:

- New buildings should have net zero emissions and assess embodied carbon
- Enhanced walking and cycling infrastructure are required throughout the County
- There should be use of licencing abilities to promote sustainable transport (e.g. electric buses, ULEZ)
- Increased policy support is needed for renewable generation projects and a broader criterion required for acceptability.

3.2 In summary, the following points were highlighted to the Board:

- 'Do nothing' would be incredibly costly to both the economy and society
- Shorter term best practice measures were set out in the 2020 study, and a Staffordshire-wide agreement was needed to deliver the 2020 study recommendations
- Board Members were key to these measures being adopted and implemented by each Local Planning Authority, however
- Extra evidence was needed to show how Staffordshire can get to net zero by 2050.

3.3 Following the Board meeting, the SSB has put forward **Appendix A** of broad policy directions to guide future planning policies in Staffordshire to help towards meeting net zero by 2050. Staffordshire County Council has asked each of the districts and boroughs to review these and decide if they will commit to exploring them as the basis of future planning policies in their area.

3.4 The policy themes in **Appendix A** cover the topics of

- new build developments
- joint working for transport/location of development
- renewable energy generation
- carbon sequestration and biodiversity

3.5 The Policy and Strategy team have reviewed the policy directions and officer comments are in **Appendix B**. For the majority, we will need to explore the extent to that they could be introduced through development management policies to encourage higher standards in new build development in developing the policies of our new local plan. This will have to have regard to national standards, including building regulations and be subject to viability testing to ensure that they would not render development unviable. Were any to unduly impact on viability, it could have implications for the level of developer contributions the council could ask for. There is no conflict with our proposed design code, and as an SPD the code could be amended in the future to reflect new local plan policies.

3.6 These policy directions would broadly contribute to help us achieve the goals that we have committed to in our Lichfield 2050 strategy and our target to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050. However, they would need to be balanced against making requirements too stringent and discouraging development. For example, it may be very costly to achieve BREEAM excellent or outstanding which it was not viable to do for our own leisure centre. As stated above viability testing will therefore be crucial to ensure that inclusion in our local plan policies would not render development unviable, which could result in other obligations, for example affordable housing being reduced.

3.7 Staffordshire County Council have asked that **Appendix A** be considered by the respective Cabinets of each Staffordshire authority for endorsement and a decision then referred to the Staffordshire Leaders Board. This endorsement is not for the implementation of the recommendations of the study, rather that we commit to exploring those recommendations through our local plan and implement them where appropriate and viable, having regard to the local plan as a whole. Should the broad policy directions be considered by Cabinet to be acceptable, we would need to consider how these are reflected in our emerging new local plan. All future local plan policies will be subject to consultation and viability testing as outlined above.

Alternative options	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To not provide feedback for consideration at the Leader’s Board in their November 2024 meeting.</li> <li>To not agree to sign the broad planning policy directions put forward by the SSB at <b>Appendix A</b>.</li> </ol>
Consultation	None.
Financial implications	None identified.
Approved by Section 151 Officer	Yes
Legal implications	This would be sought in the development of our new planning policies as they would need to be tested at the examination of the new Local Plan.
Approved by Monitoring Officer	Yes
Contribution to the delivery of the strategic plan	<p>The broad planning policies would contribute to delivery of Green Communities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Achieving carbon neutrality across the district</li> <li>- Delivering sustainable housing and development</li> <li>- Extending the tree canopy across the district</li> </ul>
Equality, diversity and human rights implications	None.
EIA logged by Equalities Officer	Not needed.
Crime & safety Issues	None identified.
Data assessment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The principles would have a positive impact on development across the district and drive progress towards our 2050 Carbon Neutrality and Sustainable Transportation goals.</li> <li>Some of the proposed standards may be prohibitively rigorous for some developers (achieving BREEAM ‘Excellent, implementing highest CO<sub>2</sub> reduction targets for new developments.)</li> </ol>
Environmental impact (including climate change and biodiversity)	<p>The document proposes broad planning policy measures along the following environmental themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Implementing improved targets and standards relating to CO<sub>2</sub> reduction, energy type and efficiency, build quality and water efficiency in new build developments.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Promotion of sustainable transport solutions across the district (support provision of ULEV vehicles, enhance walking and cycling links, introducing zero emissions zones, etc.)</li> <li>- Increasing the provision of renewable energy sources across the district</li> <li>- Increase tree and hedgerow cover across the district for biodiversity and carbon sequestration benefits.</li> </ul>
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GDPR / Privacy impact assessment	Not needed.
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	Risk description & risk owner	Original score (RYG)	How we manage it	New score (RYG)
A	Risk of the council not achieving its climate/ environmental targets.	Likelihood: Yellow Impact: Yellow Risk: Yellow	Fully considering the proposed policy directions and understanding the likely consequences of not endorsing them. Consideration of alternative policy directions for feedback to SSB, where Cabinet does not agree with those proposed.	Likelihood: Green Impact: Green Risk: Green
B	Risk that the implementation of the recommendations of the climate study through local plan policy renders development unviable.	Likelihood: Yellow Impact: Red Risk: Red	The recommendations will be considered as part of the plan-making process, including viability testing which will be required as part of the local plan evidence base. Should this evidence indicate that the requirements being placed upon development, including potential requirements resulting from the recommendations of the climate change study, then the council will need to determine which obligations are prioritised to ensure development remains viable and the local plan deliverable.	Likelihood: Green Impact: Green Risk: Green

Background documents	<b>Appendix A</b> ('Staffordshire's Climate Emergency – planning policy commitments')
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Relevant web links	
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