



# Stone Neighbourhood Plan 2031

Draft Version May 2016



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## **Executive Summary:**

This Stone Neighbourhood Plan has been formed and produced by a voluntary Steering Group made up of town councillors and co-opted local residents. Under the guidance of Urban Vision Enterprise CIC who provided professional advice from the beginning of the process and in collaboration with Stone Town Council whilst also adhering to the policies laid down in the Plan for Stafford Borough, this Neighbourhood Plan is now ready to be put firmly into place in shaping the future of Stone. Its vision is based on listening carefully to the wishes and aspirations of local people, also their ideas and needs taken from a process of community consultations. Once the Stone Neighbourhood Plan is adopted it will become part of the statutory development plan for the town meaning Stafford Borough Council will have to take the plan into account when making planning decisions which affect Stone and your local area until at least 2031, this is *your* Neighbourhood Plan.

Chairman Neighbourhood Plan Jill Hood

## Background to the Neighbourhood Plan:

This Neighbourhood Plan will set out the direction for Stone until 2031. It has been brought forward under the Government's Localism Act 2011, which aims to give local people more say in the future land use of Stone. Although the Government's intention is for local people to influence what goes on in their neighbourhood area, the Localism Act 2011 sets out important legal requirements. In accordance with such legislation, the Neighbourhood Plan must meet the basic conditions:

- Have regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State, namely the National Planning Policy Framework and Planning Policy Guidance;
- Contribute to the achievement of sustainable development;
- Be compatible with European Union (EU) and European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) obligations; and
- Be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the development plan for the area, which in this case is the adopted Plan for Stafford Borough (PfSB) Part 1 2014, and Part 2 Settlement Boundary delineation currently under examination with a proposed adoption date of December 2016.

In relation to the latter the Stone Neighbourhood Plan must reflect the strategic policies of the adopted PfSB Part 1 which are:

- i) Allocated land for a minimum of 1000 new homes to be delivered over the next 15 years; and
- ii) Allocated land for 18 hectares of new employment land.

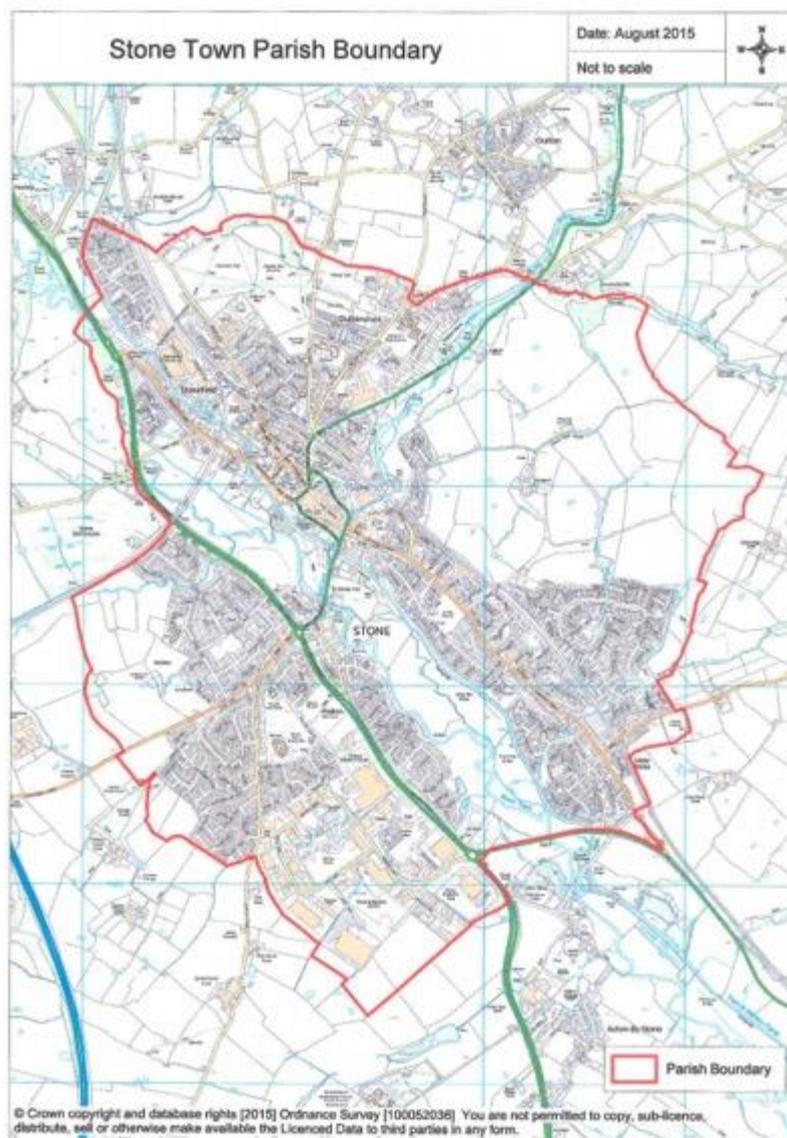
Within these constraints, the Neighbourhood Plan still gives the opportunity for local people to have control over the future of their town, by actively planning where other development should go and what benefit it would bring to the town. Furthermore it can designate local green space to safeguard, and improve and increase the local environmental and recreational resources of the town for the benefit of the health and well-being of local residents.

It can also incorporate other wider policies that go beyond land use considerations and demonstrates support for wider strategic improvements.

## The Neighbourhood Area:

In 2012 the Localism Act came into force, enabling local communities in England to take the lead in planning how their own neighbourhoods will develop. Many communities around the country have seized this opportunity to influence the future of their areas. Stone Town Council has produced this Neighbourhood Plan for Stone in order to shape the future development of the area.

The neighbourhood area is the area that will be covered by the Neighbourhood Plan. The Stone neighbourhood area, which is the same as the area defined by the Stone Parish boundary, was designated by Stafford Borough Council on the 8<sup>th</sup> December 2015. The Borough Council's decision empowers Stone Town Council to produce a Neighbourhood Plan for the Parish of Stone. The Stone neighbourhood area is shown below:



## **Purpose of the Neighbourhood Plan:**

Like many rural areas in England, Stone has been the subject of increasing pressures for development.

Neighbourhood Plans are part of the statutory planning system. This means that when decisions are made on planning applications the policies and proposals in the Neighbourhood Plan must be taken into account by the local planning authority, Stafford Borough Council.

Neighbourhood Plans are a new type of statutory plan. Not only are they intended to be produced by local people for their own areas, they also have to be agreed through a referendum of the people living in that area. Unlike national planning policy, which is approved by Parliament, or district planning policy which is approved by the local authority, a Neighbourhood Plan must be the subject of a vote by residents of the area covered by the Neighbourhood Plan.

The Stone Neighbourhood Plan will be a statutory planning policy document supported by a majority of local people, which will enable Stone Town Council to have a greater and more positive influence on how the town develops over the plan period, which covers the period 2016 to 2031.

## **The Scope of the Neighbourhood Plan:**

Although the purpose of Neighbourhood Plans is to allow local people to have a greater say in the development of their areas, each Neighbourhood Plan must be in line with and not contradict higher level planning policy. It is a legal requirement for Neighbourhood Plans to have appropriate regard to the National Planning Policy Framework and to be in general conformity with local strategic policies. A key implication of these requirements is that, where the Local Plan has a growth allocation for an area, the Neighbourhood Plan must provide scope for at least the level of growth specified in the Local Plan. This is discussed in more detail in the Local Plan section.

In planning the future development of their areas local planning authorities must set out the level of growth in housing and employment, which will take place over the next 10 to 15 years. In other words the total numbers of new dwellings that will be built and the total area of land for new employment that will be developed are both provided by the local planning authority. The

Neighbourhood Plan can determine where these dwellings or business units will go, and it can allow a higher level of growth than the local planning authority requires, but it cannot reduce the scale of these allocations.

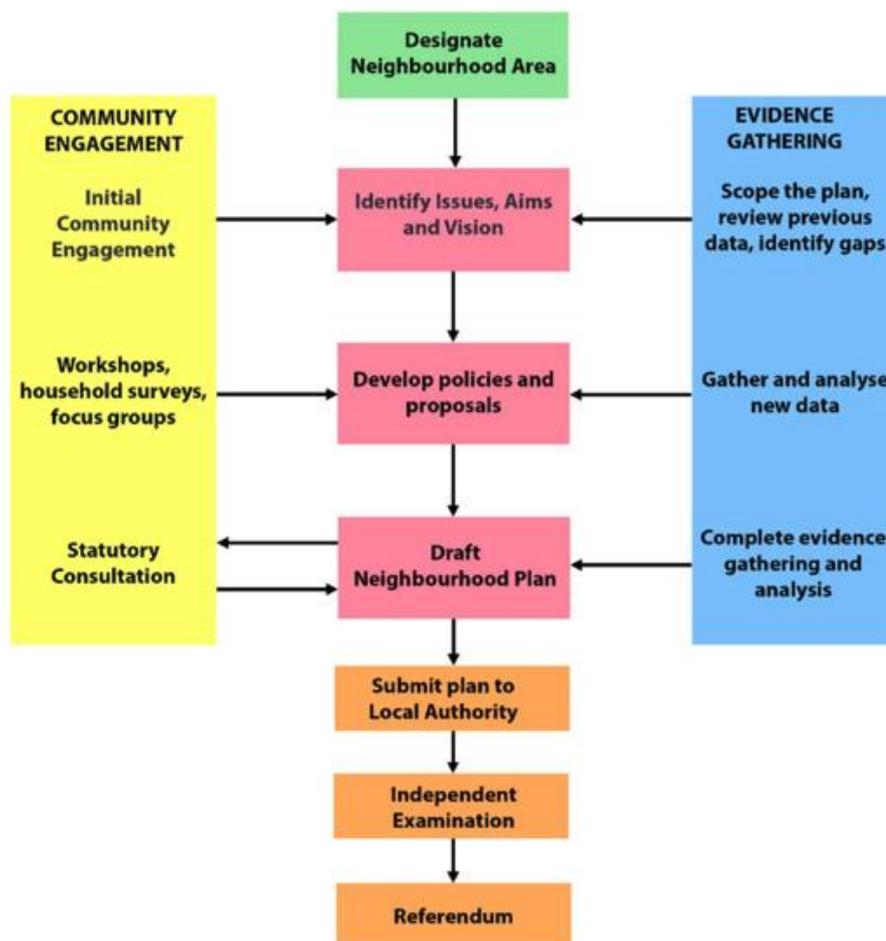
Consequently it may only deal with the same range of matters as all other statutory development plans, namely the development and use of land. Other matters, such as the promotion of events, social and community activities, advisory support for businesses, etc., and matters which are covered by separate legislation such as highways matters, cannot be dealt with in the Neighbourhood Plan.

## The Neighbourhood Plan Process:

The Neighbourhood Plan process is set out in the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012. This document defines the main stages that a Neighbourhood Plan must go through before it is voted on at the referendum. Neighbourhood Plans that do not closely follow the Regulations in the way they are produced may be vulnerable to legal challenge at a later date.

The following diagram illustrates the main stages in preparing the Stone Neighbourhood Plan.

## Main Stages of the Stone Neighbourhood Plan Process:



Neighbourhood plans must be based on relevant evidence about the neighbourhood area (the Parish of Stone) and must reflect the views of the local community. The Town Council has therefore been careful to gather the necessary evidence to inform the Neighbourhood Plan and to underpin the policies within it.

The Neighbourhood Plan itself has been led by the Stone Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Group, which is made up of Town Councillors and volunteers from the local community. In producing this draft Neighbourhood Plan the Steering Group has been supported by neighbourhood planning specialists, Urban Vision Enterprise CIC. Throughout the process the Steering Group has liaised with Stafford Borough Council who have provided practical assistance and advice on key issues such as strategic local policy.

The Town Council organised many informal consultation events to gauge local opinion at key stages in the production of the Neighbourhood Plan. In addition the Neighbourhood Plan has been the subject of a 6 week period of statutory consultation before the plan can be submitted to Stafford Borough Council. This is the stage when views about the Neighbourhood Plan are formally recorded and formally responded to, so anyone wishing to make comments must use this opportunity to register them.

During formal consultation the Town Council will advertise that the draft Neighbourhood Plan is available for people to comment on. The publicity will notify people of where they could see a copy of the Neighbourhood Plan, the deadline for comments, and where they could be returned. Details and all relevant documents are available on the Stone Town Council Neighbourhood Plan website <http://www.stonetowncouncil.org.uk/neighbourhood-plan> and forms will be made available for people to register their comments.

After the formal consultation period the Town Council will consider all the representations received and decide how to respond to them. This includes making appropriate modifications to the draft Neighbourhood Plan if necessary.

The amended Neighbourhood Plan will then be submitted to the Borough Council, along with a Consultation Statement and a Basic Conditions Statement explaining how the Neighbourhood Plan satisfies the defined legal requirements.

It is the Borough Council's duty to check whether the Neighbourhood Plan has followed the proper legal process and that it has met the legal requirements for consultation and publicity. If the Borough Council is satisfied in this regard, then the Borough Council will publish the Neighbourhood Plan and invite representations from the public and from statutory consultees. At this stage comments must focus on whether the Neighbourhood Plan satisfies the basic legal conditions.

Following the 6-week publicity period the Borough Council will appoint an independent examiner to consider the Neighbourhood Plan and any representations made at this stage. The

independent examiner's duty is limited to considering whether the Neighbourhood Plan meets the basic conditions. This means there is little scope to alter the content of the Neighbourhood Plan at this stage.

The independent examiner will prepare a report, which can recommend that the Neighbourhood Plan proceeds to a referendum, or proceeds to a referendum with appropriate modifications. If the examiner concludes that the Neighbourhood Plan does not meet the basic conditions he or she will recommend that it does not proceed to a referendum.

If the examiner finds the Neighbourhood Plan to be satisfactory, with modifications if necessary, then Stafford Borough Council will arrange for a referendum to take place. All people on the electoral register who live in the neighbourhood area (Stone Parish) will be entitled to vote in the referendum.

If more than 50% of the votes cast support the Neighbourhood Plan, then the Borough Council will bring the plan into force through a simple resolution of the Council.

## **The Local Plan:**

The current adopted local plan is the plan for Stafford Borough Pfsb Part 1. Within that plan it identifies Stone as the second in the settlement hierarchy within Stafford Borough. Census figures from 1991 to 2011 evidence a 33% growth in the town's population rising to 16,365 which will have continued to grow since then. This is compared to a 10% growth in Stafford at the top of the hierarchy. The PfsB has sought to redress this growth imbalance by allocating the greater proportion of housing development within the plan period to Stafford (7,000 units). Stone has been allocated a minimum of 1,000 units, but due to the popularity of Stone it is already 'overshooting' with the danger that it has the potential to skew disproportionately the plan-led system, which the NPPF advocates.

The Neighbourhood Plan has a role to play in ensuring that Stone plans for the proposed growth ensuring that any future development meets the needs and aspirations of the community.

## Consultation:

Consultation is vital to the Neighbourhood Planning process as this is the mechanism through which the wishes of the community are incorporated in to the Plan.

It is important to emphasise that the Stone Neighbourhood Plan actually belongs to the people of Stone, and the vision and policies within it are based on listening carefully to their wishes, and the views expressed in the consultations below with local people, businesses and others with an interest in the town.

In November 2015 the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group undertook an extensive questionnaire survey as part of the evidence gathering process and distributed this to households and businesses within the Parish. The survey was also published in the Stone Gazette, a widely read local magazine, with a slip to return to the Town Council. Information regarding the Public Consultation was also available on the Town Council website, a 'Little Bit of Stone' website, and advertised in the local press.

The survey provided essential and comprehensive feedback to the Steering Group on people's general opinions about the area, what they like, what they don't like, and what changes they would wish to see, (Placecheck).

Community Consultation drop-in events took place as follows:

- 9am to 2pm on Saturday 21st November in the High Street, Stone Town Centre
- 6:00 to 8:30 pm on Monday 23rd November at Walton Community Centre
- 6:00 to 8:30 pm on Tuesday 24th November at St Michael's First School
- 6:00 to 8:30 pm on Wednesday 25th November at Alleyne's Academy

As a direct result of some of the consultation evidence the group organise further community engagement focused on exploring Stone Town Centre with a 'Town Tour' event on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> March 2016. This provided the opportunity to look more closely at some of the issues raised during earlier engagement events.

Local residents overwhelmingly value Stone as a pleasant place to live and expressed great concern for how Stone should develop in the future.

## **Key Outcomes and Issues:**

Stone has many positive features, which make it an attractive place to live. Local people generally have a high regard for Stone and appreciate its many assets, most notably the green open spaces in and around the town, its shopping and other facilities, the ambience of Stone as a historic market town, its thriving community spirit, and the wide range of leisure and recreational activities available to residents. Stone has good transport links to nearby towns and cities, local job opportunities, good schools, and access to the canal and river meadows, which are close to the heart of the town.

These assets have made Stone a desirable place to live and, as the second largest settlement in Stafford Borough, this has made it a focus for new housing development and, to a lesser extent, employment development. In recent years the town has seen significant housing growth, which is set to continue in the site allocations made by the latest Stafford Borough Local Plan. During the Stage 1 consultation a number of local people expressed a desire to limit housing growth in Stone, because of the adverse impact this is having on local infrastructure and on local green space. A number of people emphasised the importance of protecting and enhancing existing areas of open green space, which are important to the local community.

The Stafford Borough Local Plan contains site allocations for Stone which will see the addition of a further 600 new homes in addition to those which already have planning permission. This is a strategic housing allocation, which the Neighbourhood Plan cannot alter. Given this strategic commitment to significant new development over the plan period, it will be important to ensure that the homes built are designed to the best possible standard and complement and enhance the local built environment.

Despite the expansion of the town the issue which was of great concern to many people during the Stage 1 consultation was the town centre and the High Street. The overwhelming view expressed was that the town centre is in decline, which is demonstrated by the number of charity shops and vacant shops, a reduction in the range and quality of shops available, and the loss of local independent shops. The town centre environment is not maintained to a high enough standard and some key historic buildings are underused and in need of refurbishment.

Many people were concerned about the amount of traffic, which goes through the town centre, causing congestion at peak periods and difficulties for pedestrians, serving to isolate the historic core from the residential areas around it. A number of people also mentioned a shortage of convenient, free or reasonably priced car parking.

The other main concern was overstretched local community services and facilities, which many people attributed to the increased population. In particular, medical facilities were considered to be inadequate to meet current demand and in need of upgrading. Leisure facilities for children, young people and teenagers were regarded to be inadequate and in need of improvement.

## **Stone – the Place**

In order to produce a robust Neighbourhood Plan it is necessary to have a good understanding of both the neighbourhood area and the local community's views about what should be done to improve and protect it.

This section of the Plan provides a brief history of Stone, its growth in the 20th century, and an assessment of its character.

### **Location:**

Stone is an old market town in Staffordshire which serves a significant rural hinterland. Situated about 7 miles (11 km) north of Stafford, and around 7 miles (11 km) south of the city of Stoke-on-Trent, it is the second town in the Borough's settlement hierarchy after Stafford itself. Although in mid-Staffordshire, from a national perspective it is considered as being in the North Midlands and is located almost midway between Birmingham and Manchester.

The Parish consists of two distinct areas dissected by the A34, a dual carriageway and major trunk route. To the west of the river is Walton a predominantly residential area with housing development occurring in the main, over the last 50 to 60 years. The town's main Business Park is also located here to the west.

To the east lies the town centre, and whilst there has been some housing development in the 1980's on this side of the town, comprising the estate at Aston Lodge, the Brassworks Farm area and infill along the Lichfield Rd, the older pre-Victorian and Victorian residential areas are largely situated here.

### **Landscape and Setting:**

Stone lies on the River Trent. The Trent rises on Biddulph Moor some 18 miles away and passes through Stoke-on-Trent before flowing in a north-west to south-east direction through Stone parish. The river in effect divides the parish into two halves, the main town centre to the east and Walton to the west. The Scotch Brook, a tributary to the Trent rises approximately 3 miles away near Moddershall, to the north/north-east of Stone. This fast flowing stream winds its way through the town, under an aqueduct supporting the Trent Mersey canal, joining the Trent just above the main road bridge which spans the river on Stafford Road.

The floodplain of the River Trent, which also accommodates the Trent Mersey Canal along most of its length in the parish, forms a green corridor and has two designated Local Nature Reserves within its boundaries. Westbridge Park, a recreational area for the local community and a site for hosting town events, also forms part of that corridor.

The immediate area of Stone comprises a small inlier of Keuper sandstone. These beds dip gently to the south where they are quickly buried beneath a thickening cover of red clays, which make up the Keuper marl. To the north the inlier is abruptly truncated by an east-west fault, resulting in the sandstones making a low escarpment, which defines the northern edge of the Common Plot.

In terms of topography, within the parish the land to the east of the Trent rises from a level of 88m AOD by the river itself to 160m AOD, the highest point, just above Stone Park Farm. Land to the west of the river has a gentler incline rising to approximately 115m AOD within the parish boundary.

Stone is on the border of two National Character Areas defined by Natural England, namely NCA 68 The Needwood and South Derbyshire Claylands to the east of the River Trent, and NCA 61 Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plains to the west of the river.

Although the Parish of Stone is predominantly urban in character and referred to as a market town in the above document it does have rural areas within the boundary. These fall into three further character areas:

- 1) NCA68: Settled farmlands: These are to the north/east and east of the town centre encompassing the area around Stone Park Farm behind Aston Lodge estate and the lower section of the Moddershall Valley. This is a landscape of strongly rounded or sloping landform with steeper slopes associated with narrow wooded stream valleys. Non-calcareous brown soils overlay Triassic mudstones. The dominant land use is dairying with some mixed farming. There is a varied pattern of small to medium sized hedged fields which contribute substantially to landscape character, with a scatter of small woodlands, often of ancient origin. The settlement pattern is of mixed traditional red brick buildings and not distinctive. According to Staffordshire County Council Landscape Character mapping this area is highlighted as being a sensitive area, with the critical factor which currently limits landscape quality being the loss of characteristic semi-natural vegetation, in particular ancient woodland and hedgerows and semi-natural grasslands.

- 2) NCA 61: Settled farmlands: Land to the east of Walton up to the parish boundary. Landscape characteristics include a gently undulating landform, mature broadleaved woodlands, and a strong irregular hedgerow pattern with well treed field ponds and stream corridors. The settlement pattern is mixed comprising traditional red brick farmsteads and houses. The area is not highlighted as sensitive in landscape mapping documents.
  
- 3) NCA 68: Sandstone heaths and hills: this encompasses land to the north and north east of Stone. Specifically within the parish this includes Coppice Wood and land south of Nicholl's Lane, land behind Alleynes sports Centre and land crossing Old Road to include the Common Plot. This landscape is restricted to areas where Triassic sandstones are not obscured by drift deposits. It is a landscape of mainly intact, small to medium scale irregular fields superimposed on a rolling lowland landform incised by small steep sided valleys known locally as drumbles. The small scale enclosed feel to this pastoral landscape is emphasised by the network of narrow, sunken winding lanes with small hidden settlements. Broadleaved and conifer woodlands are often associated with the steep stream valleys. Some small areas of heathland that was formerly widespread survive but make limited contribution to visual character. However it is the heathy nature of the woodlands, and the presence of bracken in hedgerows that provide the stronger visual reminder of this landscape's heathland origins. These landscapes, according to Staffordshire County Council Landscape Character documents, are of high quality with few limiting factors.

*Sources: Planning for Landscape Change SCC 2000.*

*Journal of the Staffordshire Industrial Archaeology Society Vol 4 1973 The origins of Stone by M Allbutt and S R Broad bridge*

## **History and Heritage:**

The local legend is that the town was named after the pile of stones taken from the River Trent raised on the graves of the two princes, Ruffin and Wulfad, killed in AD 665 by their father, King Wulfhere of Mercia because of their conversion to Christianity. However, this story is unlikely to be true. Wulfhere was already a Christian when he became king, and the story on which it is probably based is set by Bede in another part of the country over ten years after Wulfhere's death.

A church allegedly built over these stones in 670 lasted until the 9th century before being destroyed by invading Danes. It was replaced in 1135 by the Augustinian, Stone Priory which survived until its dissolution in the reign of Henry VIII. The building collapsed in 1749 and the present church of St. Michael's was built in 1758. All that remains of the original priory is the rib-vaulted undercroft which forms the foundations beneath Priory House on Lichfield Road.

There is no record of a village or town called Stone in the Domesday Book, however Walton is mentioned in the Domesday Book which now forms part of the historic town of Stone. The subsequent development of a significant medieval township at Stone must have had its origins in the decision to found a monastery or Priory, the site of which was chosen for good practical reasons. It lay on the ancient road from London to Chester following the Trent valley where there were fords to the now Scotch Brook and to the River Trent. The Scotch Brook stream ensured a permanent supply of clean water, adequate in volume to later work a number of mills. The site of Stone itself was reasonably well drained, whilst close enough to the flood plain and water meadows, which provided permanent pasture. To the north there lay slightly elevated ground, (Stonefield Area), underlain by sandstone and suitable for arable cultivation. With good communications at hand Stone Priory was soon confirmed as a centre of medieval life with the granting of a Market Charter some say by Henry III in 1251 and others by Edward I in 1292.

Throughout the centuries the town continued to grow. Around the nucleus provided by the Priory and regular markets and fairs, a small trading community began to develop. This is still reflected in the lay out of the town with the long narrow 'luggage tenements' stretching back on both sides of the High Street.

In the 17th and 18th centuries Stone was an important road centre. To this was added the canal in the 1770's and the railway system in the mid 1800's together with industrial development, especially of the boot and shoe manufacture. From a population of around 1,700 inhabitants in 1665, Stone grew to 7,500 by 1831, linked to the sudden onset of industry and prosperity that followed from the opening of the Trent and Mersey canal in 1777.

John Welsly in 1789 wrote: 'the Town is in a more flourishing state than formerly owing to the great navigation that passes it. It consists of one principal street which is now a pretty good one with a new market place and one of the best inns on this extensive road (from London to Chester).

### **Famous People:**

Famous people associated with Stone include Thomas Bakewell, a poet and a pioneer in the treatment of the mentally ill; John Jervis, Earl St Vincent the victor of the sea battle against the

Spanish at the Cape of St Vincent in 1797; Peter de Wint the landscape artist who is traditionally believed to have been born in Stone on 21st January 1784; Rev Stebbing Shaw one of the first Staffordshire Historians who was born in the Town in 1762; Henry Fourdrinier who redeveloped the paper making machine which revolutionised the paper making industry in this country. Foudrinier is linked to Coppice Mill within the parish, which in the 1720's is documented as a paper mill, before being converted to a flint mill in the 1800's. Richard (Stoney) Smith who was born at the Mill, (also previously known as Weavers Mill), in Mill Street in 1836 (now a restaurant) developed the flour we now know as Hovis. Cardinal John Henry Newman preached the sermon at the dedication of the nave of the Roman Catholic Church of the Immaculate Conception and St Dominic in Stone and he presented the procession lights to the Sister's at the convent which are still in use today. William Bernard Ullathorne, first Roman Catholic Bishop of Birmingham is buried transept of the Catholic Church in Stone. It was through his drive, dedication and enthusiasm as Archbishop of Birmingham in the early days of the re-establishment of the Roman Catholic Hierarchy in England, that the new diocese of Birmingham flourished and Catholicism spread throughout the area. More recently, Olympic canoeist Lizzie Neave lived and trained in the town.

### **Canal Town:**

The first meeting of the Grand Trunk Canal Company (later the Trent and Mersey Canal Company) was held in the Crown Inn, Stone on 10th June 1766. At this meeting James Brindley was appointed Surveyor-General, John Sparrow Clerk and Josiah Wedgwood Treasurer. In 1767 it was decided to locate the headquarters of the canal company in the Town. The arrival of the canal in Stone changed the Town, to quote from a contemporary source "from a sleepy market town into a busy inland sea port".

### **The Coaching Era:**

Stone was on the main road from London to the north-west and at the height of the coaching era 38 coaches a day passed through the Town, with Abbey Street being the main route stopping at several coaching inns, including The Crown in the High Street.

The present Crown Hotel was designed by the famous architect Henry Holland and replaced a much earlier Crown Inn. The end of the coaching era came swiftly after the opening of the Grand Junction Railway in 1837. By 1841 Pigot's directory showed coaches from Stone to Norton Bridge, the nearest railway station and one daily coach to Stafford and the Potteries. As railway lines spread the roads fell into disrepair and did not recover until the 20th century.

**Industry:**

Early beginnings of the boot and shoe industry in Stone can be assessed from 1756 documents. By 1851 White's directory listed 16 manufacturers in the foot-wear industry in Stone with the provision of leather from tanneries situated at the south end of Crown Street. Whilst initially most of the work was undertaken on a domestic basis, over time there was a growth in factories and sizeable workshops, employing 20% of households within the urban parish. The last quarter of the 19th century brought difficulties for the trade and in 1910 four local shoe firms merged. Lotus Ltd eventually became the last remaining business, which eventually amalgamated with the Stafford and Northampton concerns.

Due to the quality of the local water beneath Stone two brewers were located here carrying on the Augustinian monks' tradition of beer making. The most notable was John Joule & Sons Ltd, established in 1780. The company was acquired by Bass Charrington in 1968, and ceased brewing at the end of October 1974. The adjacent bottling plant was closed some years before. The canal played an important role in the export of beer. Joules' draught beer stores and bottling plant remains an imposing building on the canal and can be clearly identified by the red cross logo of John Joules in the brickwork.

The second brewer was Montgomery & Co, acquired by the Bent's Brewery Co of Liverpool in 1889. The brewery was located on what is now Mount Industrial Estate. It was also taken over by Bass and closed on 31 March 1968.

Stone also had a brass industry sited around Brassworks Farm. The farm and a short row of cottages are the only visible remains today. The works were sited to take advantage of the opening on the Trent and Mersey canal. This brought supplies of copper and cast from the Cheadle area and transported the finished goods of rolled sheet and wire. Coal was brought along the canal, although a stream gave a supplementary amount of water power. The venture whilst successful was relatively short lived with actual brass working only carried out between the years 1794 to 1830.

The lower part of the Moddershall Valley lies within the Parish. The valley as a whole, which has the Scotch Brook at its heart, is unique in that its watermills wet ground flint and bone, essential for the production of white ware, china and porcelain for the Potteries. This allowed the pottery industry to flourish resulting in famous names such as Wedgwood and Spode, amongst others, becoming part of our national heritage. Within the parish, Coppice Mill began its life c1720's as a paper mill linked to Foudrinier, before converting to grinding flint in the 1800's. The Flint Mill, next to the Mill Restaurant, was only recently discovered and its restoration and conversion to domestic use was one of the projects in the Channel 4

Restoration Man series of programmes. Remarkably seven of a total of 10 watermills in the valley remain in various states of repair, due in main to the fact they were still functioning up to the mid-20th century.

### **Town Crest:**

The Crest of Stone represents the present and former industries of the Town and County. The Wheatsheaf represents agriculture, the tun represents the brewing industry. The Chevron and the Stafford Knot are taken from the County Crest. The two black Lozenges represent that Stone lies between the former North and South Staffordshire coalfields. The shoemaker's knife and awl represent the Town's once famous boot and shoe industry. The Coat of Arms is surmounted by the mantling and a demi Pegasus issuing from a Naval crown taken from the arms of John Jervis, Earl St Vincent. The motto: Sit Saxum Firmum is Latin for Let the Stone be Firm.

### **Demographics:**

Stone is a relatively affluent market town with a growing and ageing population. According to the 2011 national census the population of the town was 16,385, an increase of 33% since 1991 and an increase of 11% over the 10 years since 2001. An estimated 49% of the population fall into socio-economic groups A,B,C1 compared with 41% for Stafford Borough as a whole.

According to the Staffordshire Observatory, the population of Stone can be anticipated to increase by at least a further 20% by 2031 implying a population of 20,000. This growth will be driven primarily by new housing and increased longevity. The residents live in approximately 6,500 households providing an average number of inhabitants per household of 2.5.

The number of senior citizens is expected to double over the period between 2011 and 2031 and may represent 35% of the population (7,000) by 2031. According to EJNSA, a least 15% (1,000) of this older population may be living alone.

These headline figures are:

# People



Stone hub is home to

**16,385** residents

... of whom, 73% are working age



**67%** of residents are in employment (aged 16-74)

(National average = 62%)

Of those in employment ...

**11%** are self-employed

(National average = 16%)



**20%** of residents have no qualifications (aged 16+)

(National average = 23%)

... and **33%** have NVQ Level 4+

(National average = 27%)

*(Data Sources: 2011 Census BUA data published by ONS on NOMIS, Staffordshire County Council IDBR Business Database, Produced by SQW)*

## Education:

Stone has a three tier education system which is operated by Staffordshire County Council. Young People attend first school from ages 4 to 9 (reception to year 4), then one of the two middle schools from age 9 to 13 (years 5 to 8), and finally Alleynes Academy from age 13 to 18 (Years 9 to 13).

The schools within the Stone Neighbourhood Plan area are shown in the table below.

Age Range	School Name & Address			
13 -18	Alleyne's Academy, Oulton Road			
9 -13	Christ Church Academy (C of E Middle School), Old Rd	Walton Priory	Middle School,	Beacon Rise
4 - 9	Christ Church C of E First Sch., Northesk St.	Manor Hill First Sch., Manor Rise, Walton	Pirehill First Sch., Tilling Drive, Walton	St Michael's C of E First Sch., Weavers Lane

In addition to state schools another option is offered through St Dominic's Priory School RC, an Independent School.

Whilst Stafford Borough Council are not responsible for education and learning directly, they do offer plenty of useful information and provide relevant contact details and web links for important topics within this area. See: <http://www.staffordbc.gov.uk/education-and-learning>

Further information about the admission process in all our state schools can found on the Staffordshire County Council website. See: <http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/education/home.aspx>

Ofsted Reports on schools in the area including pre-school choices can found at: <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report/results/any/any/any/any/any/any/any/any/st15%208qw/5/any/0/0#search2>

Stone residents feel the town has a good education system although they acknowledge its resources are being put under pressure with the increase in population. This is currently being absorbed within the existing provision but new housing development in the Walton area of the town will require community infrastructure provision to deliver education contributions to primary, middle and secondary school facilities with most of this being targeted at Manor Hill First School.

## **Business and Employment:**

Stone is a vibrant town with a diversity of business and employment, covering a wide variety of industry sectors. In recent surveys the 3 largest are wholesale, retail and motor vehicles at 16%, health and social work at 15% and 12% in manufacturing. These are either in line with or greater than the national percentages.

Stone has a good mix of businesses both in the dedicated areas of Stone Business Park, Whitebridge Industrial Estate and Mount Road, all of which are situated on the edge of town sites maximising the excellent access to the road networks without infringing upon the residential areas of the town. Within Stone, there are a number of SME businesses in addition to the retail outlets. These include design and printing, picture framing, fork lift sales and maintenance, and animal healthcare products. In addition the area also supports a number of very unique companies such as local breweries and one of Europe's leading string instrument makers and shops, Tim Toft Violins located in the main town centre.

Stone offers prospective businesses an ideal location to set up with a wealth of good local talent (Alleynes School and St Dominics Priory School produce excellent above average performing pupils), an excellent road infrastructure network by virtue of its proximity to the M6 and the cross country A50, and being within 1 hour of 3 international airports. As a pleasant place to go to work, Stone offers the ideal blend of vibrancy and peace in equal measure.

Employment within Stone takes on many forms covering all ages and genders and this is well represented in the entertainment sector where Stone has a very wide ranging and vibrant choice of dining out locations in and around the town. These range from small individual cafes through to large chains often seen in other towns and cities around the UK. The Town boasts almost every type of cuisine whether it be Chinese, Indian, Italian, Portuguese, American and of course English, employing local people of all ages and genders and providing a high level of service and excellence that continues to bring people back to our town.

## Which sectors do Stone's residents work in?



16%

wholesale, retail & motor vehicles

(National average = 16%)



15%

health & social work

(National average = 13%)



12%

manufacturing

(National average = 9%)

*(Data Sources: 2011 Census BUA data published by ONS on NOMIS, Staffordshire County Council IDBR Business Database, Produced by SQW)*

### So what about the future?

Stone continues to grow albeit at a steady pace and we have seen the introduction of new businesses seeing the value of coming to Stone. A new Industrial Park project in Meaford will continue this growth by means of creating several hundred jobs just 2 miles outside of the town centre over the next 2 – 5 years. This investment will no doubt have a positive knock on effect on the smaller SME businesses in the Town who supply goods and services to those new businesses.

The main focus currently is on ensuring a sustainable High Street and making the centre the hub of the town, and a place where work and leisure go hand-in-hand and that work-life balance is more in harmony for those in the area.

## **Shopping:**

Like most towns and cities, Stone High Street and other shopping destinations have faced long term decline with the loss of many retailers and consumer choice. This long term decline is a result of many factors including the rise of out of town shopping, growth of Internet retailers, increased business rates, poor car parking and a loss of relevance of the High Street to consumers. To expect to reverse this decline and return the shopping experience to halcyon days of old is unrealistic, but conditions can be improved to make the High Street fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century where experiential services will ensure a vibrant future.

In terms of food retailers, the Stafford and Stone Town Centre Capacity Assessment dated January 2011, identified the need for a further significant retailer to service the growing population and the likely site would be Westbridge Park. This has been vehemently opposed by much of the town's population as witnessed by the significant attendance at open meetings. Given the dramatic change in food retailing over the past 4-5 years, the need for a "larger store" should be questioned given the dramatic rise of the modern "convenience" store and consumers more frequent visits with reduced basket shopping habits. With empty High Street sites such as the old Woolworths store, a modern convenience store would support the vibrancy of the High Street and support increased footfall for the remaining independents and varied retailers.

The current independent retailers and service providers such as hairdressers, DIY and general hardware/home stores would benefit from Council lead initiatives to promote Stone and give consumers a reason to visit to supplement footfall builders such as the monthly farmers market. Council initiatives to support new start-up businesses such as Business rate holidays and business advice could encourage the growth of more relevant retailers providing employment and vibrancy.

## Community Assets and Facilities:

Stone has a vibrant community life with a wide range of facilities and assets in the town including the recently opened community Fire Station located on the A34 in Walton that offers free community spaces.



Stone Town Council leases the Frank Jordan Community Centre, which is on Lichfield Road at the bottom of the High Street, and this is regularly used by the community groups and organisations such as. Slimming World, Stone Community Hub, U3A French, St John Ambulance, Endeavour Youth Club, Community Pay Back, Richmond Fellowship.

Stone Railway Station, a transport hub in the town was built in 1848 and designed in the typical North Staffordshire Tudor style by H.A Hunt. The station is a Listed Building and was renovated by Stone Town Council in 2004, and it now offers community rooms and meeting spaces. This is situated off Station Road in Stone with free parking.



In the centre of town there are a number of coffee shops, restaurants public houses and cafés.

The Crown Hotel is situated in the centre of the High Street, and is a Grade II Listed Building. It became a hotel in 1834 and is still a thriving hotel today.



Westbridge Park is in the centre of Stone with a large grassed area on the right hand side and on the left there is a gym run by Stafford Borough Council. Westbridge Park takes its name from Westbridge House which once stood where the park is today.

The park was opened in 1951 as part of the town's Festival of Britain Celebrations and to commemorate the event a pair of wrought iron gates were produced by a local blacksmith. These gates are still there today by the pedestrian entrance to the park. The park is used by a variety of people for local events such as the annual week long Stone Festival in June, Stone Food and Drink Festival held each year the first week-end in October plus many more events which bring the community together. The park is also host to Stafford and Stone Canoe Club, centres for Guiding and Scouting, which are also used by Stone Town Band and Local committees such as the Bonfire Committee.



Stonefield Park is situated at the top end of Stone off Field Terrace. The park has a newly refurbished children's area, tennis courts and a bowling green with well stocked flower beds .



Stone Common Plot is a unique area of pasture and woodland managed by a group of Trustees representing the Town of Stone and the surrounding Rural Parishes. It is managed to meet the strict requirements of the Natural England higher-level stewardship scheme. This is to help protect the pasture, which abounds with historic features, a unique hay meadow, ancient hedgerows and extensive woodland, each of these hosting and supporting an extensive array of wildlife. As part of the management Stone Common Plot offers up to 20 hectares of summer grazing land, managed by the charitable trust.



## **Culture:**

Alongside those aspects of Stone Town that can be defined with relative ease (such as tourism, and sports and recreation) there is a rich tapestry of organisations which provide much of the character of the town as a neighbourhood.

Stone has a long Christian heritage dating back to the seventh century and the martyrdom of Wulfad and Ruthin. St Wulfad is commemorated in the name of St Michael's and St Wulfad's church, the longest established church in the town. Christ Church joined it as the second Anglican Church, in the Nineteenth Century. Stone was also a centre for the Roman Catholic revival and St Dominic's is a major feature of the town. The free church, St John's, is still active albeit no longer in its original building.

Music and dance are prominent with the Stone Choral Society (nearly 50 years' old), the Stone Town Band and the Scout & Guide Band performing regularly, now joined by the Cantiamo chamber choir. The Stone Recorded Music Society, the Blue Diamonds Square Dance Club and the Stone Scottish Dance Group must be added to this aspect along with the theatre groups, Stone Revellers, Rooftop Studios, Pop and Stage Academy, and Chuckle Productions.

A keen interest in horticulture is evident not only by the number of allotments in the town but also by specific organisations: Stone Flower Club, Gardening Club of Stone, Stone Chrysanthemum and Dahlia Society and the Stone and District Begonia Society.

There is a wide variety of charitable and community support organisations, ranging from the Freemasons, Rotary, and Lions through Probus, U3A and the Womens' Institute, to the Red Cross, the Community Hub and First Responders. Stone in Bloom, the Stone Festival Committee and the Stone International Friendship Association should be added to this list, as too must be the ex-services organisations: the Royal British Legion and the Royal Air Forces Association.

The younger age group are catered for by the Endeavour Youth Club, the Scouts, the Girl Guides, the St John Ambulance and the two successful military cadet groups: the Stone Detachment (Mercian) of the Army Cadet Force, and No 2352 (Stone) Squadron of the Air Training Corps.

Other special interest groups include: Stone Watercolour Class, Stone Civic & Historic Society, North Staffordshire Association of Bell Ringers, the Stone & District Motorcycle Club and the Stone patchwork and quilters.

It is unfortunate that the town does not have an adequate community centre where all these organisations can meet. This is a particular challenge for the performance groups who desperately need a well-equipped auditorium seating at least 250 people.

## **Traffic and Transportation:**

Stone historically has always been an important town in terms of road connections to other parts of the country. Stone's location on the major road route between London and Chester, and ultimately to Ireland was a significant factor in the town's growth and continuing importance. This route was described by Ogilby in 1675 as "...one of the most frequented roads in the kingdom". Stone lay at the junction of this road with another major road from the south via Birmingham and Stafford to Manchester and north to Scotland. Other roads approached from Eccleshall to the south-west and from Leek to the north-east.

Stone continues to be well connected by road to surrounding towns, but also further afield due to its location mid-way between junction 14 and 15 of the M6. Being only a seven to ten minute car journey away in either direction allows ease of access to both north and southbound journeys and the full motorway network. The result being that Stone is very much a commuter town with heavy reliance on car usage.

Getting to work figures taken from the 2011 census over the 3 wards in Stone show the following data, confirming the heavy reliance on cars:

5,747 people use cars or vans (2,002 from Walton ward, 1,918 St Michaels ward, and 1,827 from Stonefield ward).

302 people use trains or buses (87, 80, and 135 respectively)

797 people work at or from home (225, 274, and 298 respectively)

1,455 people use other methods i.e. taxi, motorcycle, bicycle, walk and passengers in cars (529, 362, 564 from the respective wards).

The disadvantage to the proximity to the M6 corridor is that when accidents happen on this section of the motorway, and this is not infrequent, the traffic is diverted onto the A34, a dual carriageway road which dissects the parish in two. This results in gridlock across the local road network which currently at peak times is already congested. The PFSB acknowledges there is

already congestion on the A520 Leek Rd into Stone and similarly the B5026 from Eccleshall which takes the traffic from the residential areas of Walton down to the A34. Alleviation of this congestion is a significant concern to local residents, particularly as Walton is currently accommodating an expansion of 592 homes within the area over the plan period, with a potential further 114 homes at Public Inquiry in July.

Stone as highlighted in the PfSB has an oversupply of 4 and 5 bedroomed houses which results in a higher proportion of 2+ car families. The use of bicycles as a mode of transport to work is very limited.

Whilst the PfSB attempts to encourage more sustainable methods of transport the reality is that bus services are currently being reduced. The 101 is the only bus giving a good regular service to both Stafford and Newcastle/Hanley. Other bus services are irregular and whilst servicing employment areas out of the town for those who have early start times, the same cannot be said of those office personnel who commence work later. Furthermore the local bus services which operate within the town residential areas do not start early enough to accommodate those who would wish to catch a bus or train from Stone Town Centre to get to work for 9am. Dedicated earlier buses which link to these services could incentivise individuals to relinquish their reliance on the car. Further bus provision will also be required with the expansion of the Meaford Development site and the building out of the Strategic Development Location site at Walton over the plan period.

Stone's only High School, Alleyne's Academy also generates significant cross town vehicle movements and hence congestion, due to a lack of bus services at appropriate times.

Stone's rail service resumed in December 2008 after some years of rail replacement bus services, and prior to 2003, a very poor stopping service for the Stoke to Stafford route. Since the London Midland Trent Valley trains started calling at Stone in 2008 passenger numbers have increased by 10% yearly to 103,472 in 2013-2104. Commuting to Stoke and Stafford is well used but the journey to Birmingham has been discouraged by having no convenient early evening return journey. Commuting to the north requires train changes at either Stoke or Crewe. However off-peak services and weekend use for leisure purposes continues to rise, given the reasonable train fares, particularly to London.

Rail access to Stone is provided through the two sections of the West Coast Mainline and much has been done to improve rail usage over recent years. Improving access to the rail station and secure appropriate levels of parking for both cars and bicycles is a priority, as is ensuring there

is adequate provision for taxis through extending existing or creating new appropriately placed taxi ranks.

Stone is an important canal town and the Trent and Mersey canal bringing tourists into the town. There is good provision for Canal boats with services provided at Stone Town Boat Yard and Chandlery and nearby at Aston Marina.

There is a service for the elderly run by Age Concern which is reliant on volunteer drivers, however that is under pressure and will become even more so as the population of Stone ages.

## **Infrastructure:**

Over recent years traffic movements on principal routes bisecting Stone have increased pressure on the road network during peak periods. The greatest pressures are on the A34 at the Walton and Stone Business Park roundabouts as well as through the centre of Stone on the A520 road. As a result of new development in Stone over the Plan period it may be necessary to implement transport management schemes in order to reduce such pressures.

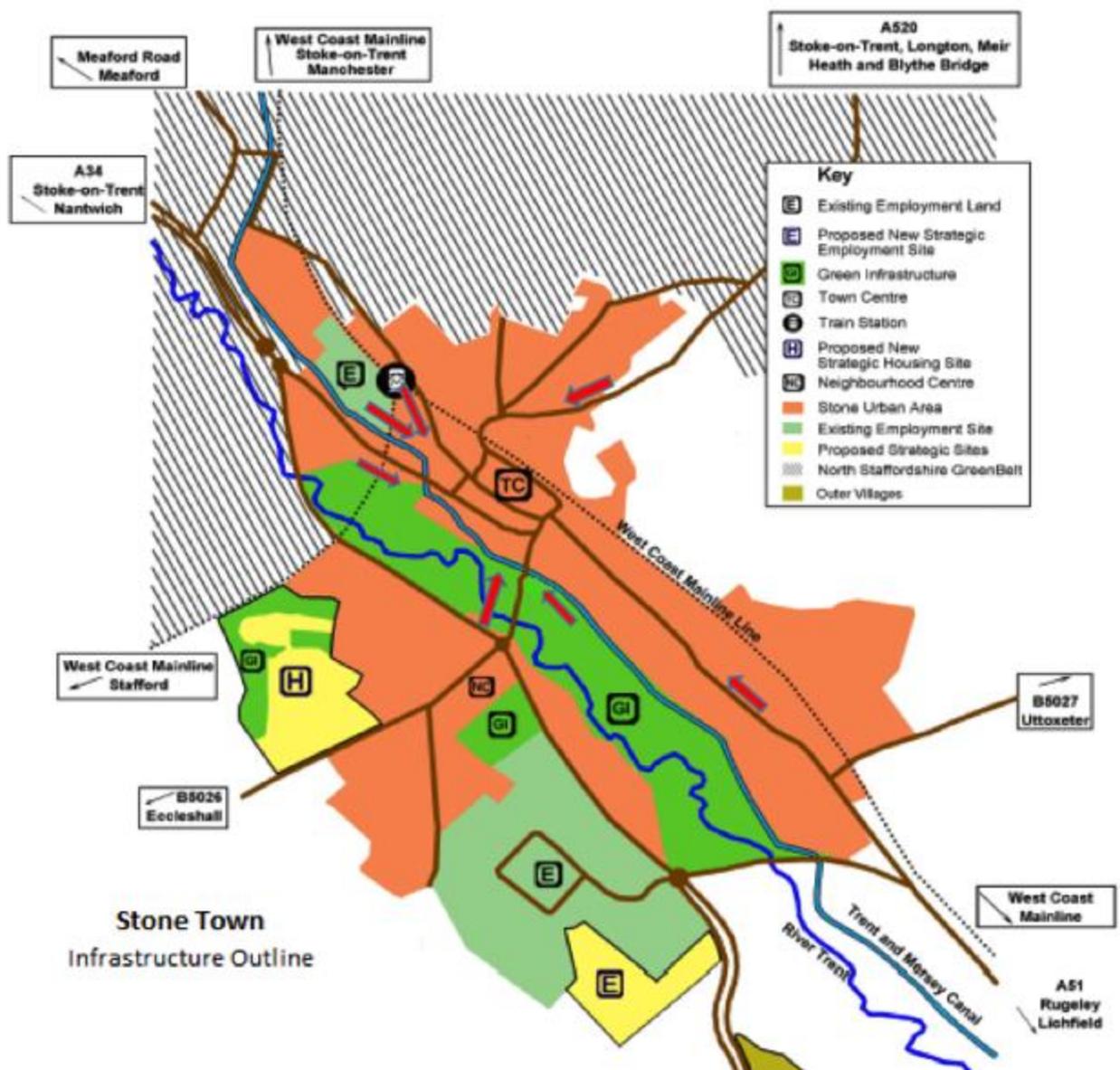
Although significant numbers of people work in Stone, there is a high degree of in and out commuting, which adds pressure to the transport infrastructure. Travel to work patterns indicate that only a minority of journeys are made by public transport, walking and cycling with the majority made by private car. The location of development and the way that development is carried out is very important in helping to reduce the need to travel.

An important consideration in terms of new residential development at Stone will be the potential impact of additional foul water flows on the current sewerage system. During times of heavy rainfall the capacity in parts of the sewerage system can be exceeded resulting in localised sewer flooding. Depending on the location of development additional sewerage capacity may be required to reduce flood risk. New development to the west of Stone will drain via an existing sewage pumping station at Westbridge Park where capacity assessments will be required to determine whether further capacity is required. Any capacity improvements will need to coincide with development construction.

Information from Severn Trent Water has identified that any "on site" mains required for particular developments will need to be met by landowners and developers. Off-site reinforcement will be required to secure levels of service to Stone. Current proposals are to reinforce the trunk main network in Stone. It is planned that this is constructed by 2016.

With regards to community infrastructure provision, new development will be required to deliver education contributions to primary, middle and secondary school facilities in Stone. Significant development in the Walton area of the town may require improvement of existing school sites in the locality.

Electricity providers have identified that the 11kV infrastructure in Stone is at capacity and therefore new development will require local improvements with further details to be provided by Central Networks. However no major gas infrastructure would be required in Stone, with 'standard' connections to the medium pressure system to be provided by developers.



(Source: Adopted Plan for Stafford Borough (PfSB) Part 1 2014)

The map illustrates the general topology of Stone with its two main urban areas straddling the Trent flood plain. The orientation of the landscape determines the general north/south orientation of the town. Hence communication routes follows the same patterns with 4 lanes of the A34, Trent & Mersey Canal, River Trent and a branch of the West Coast Mainline rail link all following the same pattern. These transport links provide important gateways into Stone (shown by the red arrows).

It is hoped that measures to improve accessibility by non-car transport modes to Stone Town Centre through walking and cycling connections will be developed.

### **Transport:**

Road: Significant numbers of people work in Stone and there is a high degree of in and out commuting, which adds pressure to the transport infrastructure. The A34, A520, A51 and the B5026 provide important road links with Stone, and Stone Town Council with work with Stafford Borough Council and other partners to improve accessibility to Stone Town Centre, particularly by public transport, from the surrounding villages through better bus services with increased service levels, frequency, and punctuality of services, and seek to reduce the levels of traffic congestion on A34 and the A520 road through the town centre including improvements in traffic management. It also intends to extending the existing and creating new cycle and walking paths including those with disabilities as an integral part of new developments. Local highway improvements and enhancements of the B5026 Eccleshall Road, the A34 roundabouts and the A34/A51 roundabout are also required.

### **Town Centre:**

Stone High Street has a mix of unique independent shops plus retail chain stores W.H. Smiths, Boots and a Midlands Co-Op which houses the town's only post office. Barclays, HSBC, NatWest and Lloyds Bank plus the Hanley Economic and Leek Building Society provide visitors and residents with adequate financial services.

For medical purposes Cumberland House doctors' surgery, three pharmacies, the Dyslexia Association, Resolve (substance abuse), two opticians and two dental surgeries which take NHS patients mean residents are well catered for in the town for their health needs. Defibrillators are placed at either end of the town and have proved their worth in usage.

Stone Town Council offices house a police station, a Citizens Advice Bureau and Age Concern Stone & District for anyone over the age of fifty, offering a free advice service which is available five mornings a week. The library in the Market Square is a focal point for information and

internet access. There are numerous pubs and eateries to cater for any taste or nationality which attract visitors from far afield.

High Street signage should be improved and could be better connected to the canal, river walks and local transport. Many town businesses in general have garish coloured signs of all shapes and sizes with a mish-mash of shop fronts. Shop frontages need to be uniform and brought in-keeping with the Heritage and Conservation Area creating a more attractive High Street. There also needs to be a focus on bringing new business back to the small amount of vacant shops creating a more vibrant town and range of independent shops which will increase visitor numbers across the town centre. Local employment opportunities are available on the High Street for work that is productive and generates a good income, adding to the local economy.

The police station is seldom manned and confidence in the current service is poor, more officers “on the beat” with a High Street presence would be valued.

The Citizens Advice Bureau exists with drastically reduced hours and appointments, resulting in residents travelling to Stafford for appointments; this is not acceptable for the majority. There is great need for an improved and adequate increase in the number of doctors as available appointments are scarce and emergency appointments hard to come by.

In the evening the Market Square is continually clogged with parked cars accessing the local restaurants. The impact of parked cars on the pedestrian environment is harmful. The availability of sufficient free car parking is essential and will maintain the vibrancy of the High Street.

The Market Square generates substantial economic value, and is a valuable public space with a cosmopolitan atmosphere, the local restaurants put out tables and chairs for diners. The square is in the middle of the High Street and is a multi-functional area used for social interaction for both formal and informal social and cultural activities encouraging residents and visitors to come together strengthening the communal spirit of the town. The square hosts a once a month Farmers market and a weekly market run by the Town Council which has invested in the square paving it with York Stone and installing electricity points available for stall holders. Festivals and street parties place their stage in the market square making it the main focal point for audiences.

## **Environment:**

### **Green Spaces:**

(see Plan from PfSB, above)

The main provision for Green Infrastructure (GI) is along the River Trent flood plain. In addition, The Common Plot, Walton Common and nearby amenity areas of the Downs Banks and Aston Nature Reserve also provide important assets close to the town. Other major open green spaces are provided through Springfield Park and Westbridge Park which is an important focus for the town's festivals as well as sports and recreational activities. GI will be strengthened through the new development scheme (H), increasing provision and enhancing biodiversity assets within and around the town.

### **Utilities:**

Pirehill wastewater treatment works provides treatment for Stone and is scheduled for improvements. An important consideration in terms of new residential development at Stone will be the potential impact of additional foul water flows on the current sewerage system.

During times of heavy rainfall the capacity in parts of the sewerage system can be exceeded resulting in localised sewer flooding.

### **Healthcare:**

Hospital services are provided through The Royal Stoke University Hospital and the smaller County Hospital at Stafford. GP services are provided by Cumberland and Mansion House surgeries. Primary health care provision will be delivered by increased capacity at existing facilities.

### **Development:**

In addition to that marked on the plan above (in brown) from the Plan for Stafford Borough (2011-2031) POLICY STONE 2 – WEST & SOUTH OF STONE outlines the main residential development zone for Stone. Marked (H) this plans to delivery of approximately 500 new homes with 40% being affordable housing in the context of Policy C2 through a mix of housing types, tenures, sizes and styles with proportions of 2, 3 and 4 bedroomed properties.

### **Business Parks:**

Stone has two Business Parks marked on Plan... Stone and Whitebridge Business Park. Just outside the neighbourhood area (to the north) is the developing Meaford Business Park. It is the intention of the Borough to add at least 18 hectares of new employment land south of Stone

Business Park with comprehensive links for a range of transport modes to residential neighbourhoods.

#### Stone Town West and South Infrastructure Requirements

Infrastructure Category	Requirements	Phasing	Capital Cost	Funding
Transport	An access, transport and travel plan strategy for the Strategic Development Location that maximises travel and accessibility by non-car transport modes via safe, attractive and conveniently designed street, pedestrian and cycling connections within the development and to Stone town centre, nearby existing and new employment areas. The strategy shall identify access points to the site and between the site and the existing settlement. It shall also identify construction access arrangements that do not disrupt existing residents and improvements to transport capacity along the B5026 Eccleshall Road, and at the A34 roundabouts	2011-2031	TBC	None committed, but potential sources include:  Developer contributions
Nature Conservation and Biodiversity (CRITICAL)	Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace to be provide through (a) on-site open space provision, (b) management of Cannock Chase, or (c) contributions towards 'Suitable Alternative Natural Green space' (SANGS) elsewhere.	2011-2031	TBC	Developer contributions and / or direct provision.
Electricity (CRITICAL)	Connection to grid. Provision of a local electricity sub-station.	2011-2031	£4m	Developers will be required to pay for connections.
Gas	Reinforcement for housing sites	N/A	£150-250k (TBC)	TBC
Potable Water (CRITICAL)	Reinforcement of the water supply required. 1.2km of 450mm pipe in A34 Stone required to protect water levels of service in Stone	2011-2031	£1.7m	Severn Trent (AMP5). Developers funds on site mains
Sewage	Notional modelling indicate additional flows from housing is not expected to have significant impact on sewer capacity with foul flows draining to an existing sewage pumping station at Westbridge Park. Capacity issues are	Lead time of 3 years	£5.2m identified for all SDLs at Stafford and Stone. Investment allocated when	Not in current Asset Management Plan

Infrastructure Category	Requirements	Phasing	Capital Cost	Funding
	not envisaged with the new employment area due to the proximity of the sewage treatment works		new development is delivered	
Education	Extension of existing secondary school required to accommodate projected growth in pupils. School to be expanded yet to be determined.  New Primary School provision to be included in Master Plan	2016+  2016+	£2m (TBC)	DfE Capital Programme (under review) / Developer contributions.  Developer contributions
Primary Healthcare	Project in development which could serve new development on the West of Stone	2016+	£5m (TBC)	GP consortium.
Telecommunications	Stone exchange is enabled with Superfast Fibre Access Broadband. No cost implication for developer over standard telecommunications infrastructure.	N/A	TBC	
Open Space	Will need to be planned in association with requirements for SANGs and local standards of provision.	2016+	Unknown	Developer contributions.

(Source: Adopted Plan for Stafford Borough (PfSB) Part 1 2014)

## Local Green Space:

In March 2012, the Government made it possible for green spaces with a special community importance to qualify for a new protection status. This status is known as 'Local Green Space'. The Local Green Space status has been made possible through the introduction of the Localism Act and Natural Environment White Paper (2011) which influenced the policies in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

The Natural Environment White Paper 2011 highlighted the "importance of green spaces to the health and happiness of local communities". Green spaces, particularly 'natural' green spaces, located close to local people provide a range of social, environmental and economic benefits including improved mental and physical health, increased social and physical activity and improvements to children's learning, improved community cohesion and sense of place. Environmental benefits include making places more attractive to live, work and play and to invest in and enhance wildlife habitats and corridors and provide for climate change adaptation.

The act of designating sites as Local Green Space is not intended to be a reactionary exercise which only takes into account sites under threat from development. Based on information in the

UK Natural Environment White Paper (2011), the act of designating sites for Local Green Space protection is seen as a positive step towards recognising an area's unique value and worth.

Broad guidance for identifying sites worthy of Local Green Space designation is provided in the National Planning Policy Framework (paragraphs 76-78). Further guidance is available in the Planning Practice Guidance, (PPG), Local Green Space Designation document dated 06/03/2014.

#### Criteria for Designation

Paragraph 19 of the PPG states that land does not have to be in public ownership to be designated Local Green Space. Neither does it need to have public access (paragraph 17). Reflecting NPPF paragraph 77, all sites must meet the following criteria:

- 1) Not with an extant planning permission within which the Local Green Space could not be accommodated.
- 2) Not allocated for development in the relevant Neighbourhood Plan/Local Plan.
- 3) Not an extensive tract of land.
- 4) Local in character.
- 5) In proximity to the area it serves.
- 6) Demonstrably special to the local community.

Additionally all sites must meet at least one of the following criteria:

Hold particular local significance....because of its beauty; its historical significance; its recreational value; its tranquillity; its wildlife; for any other reason.

Figures published by the census from 1991 to 2011 evidence Stone's population increased by 33%. The 2011 population of 16,385 will have already increased and will continue to do so due to the requirement under the PfSB that Stone provides at least another 1,000 homes over the plan period to 2031. Current commitments have already exceeded this amount and could indeed increase due to the fact that Stone continues to be a very popular place to live. With this increasing population comes the requirement to ensure that adequate and readily accessible local green space, and particularly natural green space, is available for the community to enjoy.

A key aspect of what makes Stone an attractive and desirable place to live is the current positive balance between green space, natural green space and the built environment which generates an overall 'feeling of space' as you move around the parish. Furthermore every approach into the town, be it by the A34 and Stafford Rd, A520 Moddershall Valley, the B5027

Lichfield and B5026 Eccleshall Roads has trees and green space creating a pleasing experience and inviting visitors to explore the area further.

In designating the areas of Local Green Space in this Neighbourhood Plan, the aim is to preserve and where possible enhance such areas, thus maintaining all that is special and unique to Stone.

An assessment of green spaces across the town has been carried out using the NPPF criteria outlined above, and a total of 56 sites have been identified as Local Green Spaces. This assessment forms part of the Neighbourhood Plan evidence base.

Examples of identified Local Green Spaces include:

- **Westbridge Park:** Westbridge Park is the largest park in Stone providing leisure and recreational facilities for the whole community. It takes its name from Westbridge House which once stood where the children's play area is sited today, and presumably that name had its origins in the fact it was west of the bridge that spans the River Trent. It is bounded by the Trent and Mersey Canal to the east and the Trent to the west. After the war and under the ownership of Stone Urban District Council, Westbridge House was demolished, and in 1951 the Park was opened as part of the Town's Festival of Britain celebrations. To commemorate the event, a pair of wrought iron gates were produced by a local blacksmith which still remain today at the pedestrian entrance. Some twenty two years later, agreement to the transfer of ownership of Westbridge Park to Stafford District Council, (now Stafford Borough Council), is evidenced in minutes of Stone Urban District Councils' meeting of the 18<sup>th</sup> December 1973.

The Park comes within the remit of policy CAF3, in that it is a recognised Asset of Community Value. It contains expansive areas of natural and semi natural green space along with three tennis courts, a formal children's play area, a skate park, scout and guide buildings and a fitness centre. It is also the home to the prestigious Stafford and Stone Canoe Club which since its establishment in 1973 is now recognised as one of Europe's' foremost canoe slalom clubs producing world class canoeists for GB teams. The Park provides a venue for many of the Town's annual events, and provides a focal point for festivities during the week long Summer Festival in June; the Spring Fun Fair; the Stone Food and Drink Festival on the first weekend in October, which has grown to become one of the Midlands' biggest and busiest gastronomic events; and the Stone Town Bonfire. As a contrast the Park also offers the opportunity for peaceful walks both

along the river and within the meadows, where the adjoining woodland is also rich in flora and fauna.

- **Tilling Drive Allotments:** These allotments have existed for at least 40 years and contain around 100 plots. The land, previously owned by a private company, was donated to the community, resulting in the formation of Community Interest Company which oversees the allotments. The allotments are very well tended, and evidence a strong and inclusive community ethos with a communal area, a section for children to grow produce and an easy access area with raised beds. In particular, the 2014 Stafford Borough Council Green Awards commended these allotments for their 'Community Area'. They are highly valued by the local community for the benefits they bring such as exercise, a healthy lifestyle, the provision of home grown produce, and the opportunity for social interaction with like-minded people.
- **Nicholls Lane:** Is a 1.9 hectare Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace situated on the north-east periphery of Stone and lying within the Moddershall Valley Conservation Area. It is in private ownership. It has a public footpath, (Stone Town 13), which crosses the field south west to north east that is used on a daily basis, and particularly so by dog walkers, who may let their animals off the lead because there is no grazing stock. Other well-worn paths cross and circumnavigate the field. It is also used for other forms of informal recreation such as picnicking and sledging both in recent times and historically. The field abuts woodland designated as both a Site of Biological Importance for its flora, and a County Wildlife site. It is part of the green corridor formed by the valley, which extends outwards from the town to the Green Belt in the north and east. In this location the Green Belt defines the boundary of both the field and the town. The field has been subject to a planning application which was dismissed on Appeal, ref APP/Y3425/A/13/2203362. It is very highly valued by the local community who enjoy the beautiful views across the valley, its tranquillity, historical significance, and plentiful wildlife.
- **Millennium Way:** This area of approximately 1 hectare encompasses five distinct and different sized parcels of landscaped amenity green space, planted with both trees and shrubs, which are bisected by the feeder road from the A34 to the Whitebridge housing development and Industrial Estate. These parcels of land also back onto the Trent and Mersey canal and incorporate land to the east of Millennium Way. Together they constitute a significant piece of open space for informal recreational use by the community, as well as providing a habitat for wildlife, a paved link to walks by the canal

and the countryside beyond, and enhancement of the entrance to the large Whitebridge housing development. All these factors help to promote a sense of well-being for the local community in the area. The section immediately next to the A34, which is planted with wild flowers, also creates a sense of space which is replicated in the main, on other gateway approaches into Stone, and is perceived as an important feature of the town.

## Sport & Recreation: Stone's Sporting Future



Stone residents enjoy a variety of ways of being “physically active” from active play and traditional sport to activities such as walking, dancing and gardening. Residents can attend a multitude of studio fitness/mobility and dance classes to participation amongst international and Olympic canoeists. The area is also particularly strong in club cricket and all popular racket sports are represented by people playing tennis, badminton, table tennis and squash. It should be noted that senior residents have provision supported by U3A, for example croquet at Stone SP cricket club. Stone people’s social development and community spirit are enhanced in the “fun of the outdoors” particularly on local market days and at its various festival events when raft races, running, dog derby and duck races are well received. In comparison, the town turned out “in force” to support “The Tour of Britain” cycle race.

The Trent flood plain bisects Stone and is defined by the River Trent and the Trent & Mersey Canal. It hosts local meadows and the town’s main riverside park which is an important and integral part of Stone people’s well-being. These spaces are complemented by the Victorian ‘Stonefield Park’ and the recreational space on Tilling Drive. Footpaths for walkers and routes for cycles cross these areas. In



close proximity to the flood plain are other natural green spaces which include allotments, ‘Walton Common’ and the ancient meadow of the ‘Common Plot’. Just outside the Neighbourhood Plan area are the ‘Downs Banks’ (National Trust), the Moddershall Valley Conservation Area and Aston Marina (a popular local leisure & recreational centre).

Most of Stone's more traditional Sports Capacity is located at Alleyne's Sports Centre, Westbridge Park Fitness Centre and Stone Lawn Tennis & Squash Club. Two local cricket teams have their own



facilities and one has hosted minor counties cricket in the past. It should be



noted that the town's football, rugby, hockey and some bowls teams are using private facilities outside the neighbourhood area.

Additional unmet demand is also taken up by small dedicated facilities in the private sector particularly in the areas of fitness and swimming whilst village and school halls provide additional capacity for fitness and dance courses.

It will be the aim of the Neighbourhood Plan to work with approved interested parties which promote the five key outcomes of the Government's new sporting strategy 'Sporting Future Accessibility': physical well-being, mental well-being, individual development, social and community development, and economic development.

## **Tourism:**

Stone is winner of eight consecutive gold medals, awarded to the town by the Royal Horticultural Society's Heart of England in Bloom. Stone is an attractive visitor destination and all efforts should be made by local authorities to provide affordable long stay and short stay parking, upgrade street furniture and maintain the canal and riverside walks.

Stone is a popular canal and market town, with good road, rail and canal links, close to many great tourist attractions such as Trentham Estate, Alton Towers and Wedgwood Pottery, all easily accessible from the town. Promotion of Stone's close proximity to these destinations should be maximised to encourage the passing tourism trade.

Stone has a great reputation for its festivals and street parties and every effort must be made to improve the marketing and promotion of events such as:

- Weekly Town Market.
- Monthly Farmers Market and Craft Market.
- June: the week long Summer Festival.
- July: Music Festival (Market Square).

- October: Stone Food and Drink Festival, one of the Midlands' biggest and busiest food festivals attracting thousands of visitors to the town.
- November: Christmas Lights switch on with a spectacular display of Christmas trees and lights, late night shopping, and fun fair.
- November: the annual bonfire held on Westbridge Park.
- All year round Stone in Bloom.

Events attract visitors who have the maximum effect in boosting the local economy by enjoying the hotels, bed and breakfasts, unique independent High Street shops, restaurants and the real ale trail pubs. The canal particularly attracts visitors to Stone from a wider area, and more moorings are essential to encourage longer stays in the town. Tourists who are looking for a more serious experience can trace the old market town history back to medieval times. St Michael's and St Wulfad's Church has a 12th century seal matrix of Stone Priory permanently on display. The seal attracts tourists from the UK and many parts of the world. Also within the town lies the lower section of the Moddershall Valley Conservation Area.

This valley through which the Scotch Brook flows, retains six out of an original nine watermills which ground flint and bone from the mid-18th to the mid-20th century to supply the pottery industry in Stoke on Trent. These mills are inextricably linked to the developing success of the pottery industry, with names such as Wedgwood, Spode, and Minton amongst others becoming part of our National Heritage. Consequently these mills are not just of local interest and there is potential to promote them as a further tourist attraction.

Stone has an established tourism base during the specific season of June to November; a programme should be developed, marketed and promoted to generate tourism during the town's "off season" to increase revenue for local businesses.

## **Special Character Areas:**

The Stone Urban area comprises two distinct settlements: that to the east of the River Trent (which can itself be divided into 3 distinctive character areas); and Walton to the west of the river. These settlements are separated by a green corridor around the River Trent and between the river and the Trent and Mersey canal.

The 5 areas outlined above are described in terms of their distinctive features.

**Centre of the Town:**

Much of the centre of the town lies within Stone Conservation Area. It contains mainly retail and small businesses but there is also residential use, mainly apartments, including a number of retirement flats.

Commercial and retail uses are focused primarily along the High Street and directly off it. There is a relatively high proportion of independent retailers, a hotel, a number of banks, a GP surgery, a dental surgery, a mid-size convenience store, a number of restaurants, coffee shops and public houses, and several charity shops. There is a second larger supermarket and more apartment buildings just to the east of the High Street itself.

The High Street has restricted access to vehicles and is regarded as a safe place to walk and shop. It is home to popular monthly farmers markets and smaller weekly market days. A number of the upper floors of the commercial units in the High Street have been converted into apartments and this seems to be a growing trend.

The building stock in and around the High Street is for the most part Georgian and Victorian. The former date from the town's time as a market town, its position on the coaching routes from London to the North and Ireland and to the arrival of the canal and its associated businesses. The latter date from the town's industrialisation and growth in the mid-19th century (notably due to boot making and brewing). There are a small number of later infill developments both retail and residential.

There are places of worship in the centre of the town and also a town hall, a public library and a community centre. To the west of the canal the old workhouse has been converted into apartments and there is a small development of sympathetically designed new housing and a health centre.

There are more than 50 listed buildings and monuments within this area of the town of which five are Grade II\* Listed. Several of the listings relate directly to the canal. There are also a number of unlisted buildings of townscape merit which provide interest and variety.

**North of the Centre:**

This area is delineated by the Longton Road (A520) running north-east out of Stone through the Moddershall Valley, the Newcastle Road running north to meet the A34 and by the settlement boundary. The area is largely residential and much of it is Victorian in origin complimented by small clusters of post war developments.

Part of the area lies within Stone Conservation Area, notably Kings Avenue, Granville Terrace and The Avenue. Most of the housing stock dates from mid-Victorian times with a few later Victorian/Edwardian houses and a few more modern infill developments.

The Victorian/Edwardian properties lying within the Conservation Area are typically large 2 or 3 story properties with small frontages and sizable back gardens. There are also a number of large properties of the same period on Oulton Road many of which have extensive land attached and in some cases this has been sold off for small scale infill development.

Most of the remaining area consists of Victorian terraced streets of what were once factory workers' cottages. These have no front gardens or off-street parking but enjoy modest back gardens. Good examples of such properties are to be found around Stonefield Park.

Properties a little further from the centre of town in and around along Mount Road and Newcastle Road consist largely of mid to late 20th century housing. Beyond the Newcastle Road and at the end of Mount Road and bounded by the canal Navigation Loop, a modern housing development comprising for the large part 4 and 5 bedroom houses interspersed with some smaller properties and apartments.

Just north of the centre there is the 19th century St Dominic's Church, alongside St Dominic's School and Care Home. A little further north is the Grade II Listed Railway Station and on the Newcastle Road, the Stone Tennis and Squash Club.

At its farthest reach the area to the north is also home to 2 light industrial estates and there is also light industry and commercial offices situated in the old Joules brewery buildings on the Newcastle Road and close to the centre itself.

The northern area contains several place of worship and area is served by Christchurch First and Middle Schools and by Stone's only secondary school, Alleyne's Academy. There are around 30 Listed Buildings and monuments in the area to the north of which 5 relate directly to the canal.

The area also contains valuable green space, notably Stonefield Park and the area is bounded to the north by the Common Plot, several acres of land left in trust and dedicated to the leisure and recreation of the people of Stone.

**South of the Centre:**

The area south of the centre is delineated by the canal to its west, the A51 to the south and the settlement boundary to the east. Its main road artery is the Lichfield Road. It is almost exclusively residential with older Georgian and Victorian housing stock close to the centre and more modern post-war developments of differing size and style lying beyond this.

Housing development along the Lichfield Road is typically of older post-war stock often set back from the road and enjoying sizeable gardens.

The more recent housing, comprises a series of moderate sized developments between road and canal and generally smaller in-fill developments lying between the road and the railway line.

At the limit of the settlement boundary to the south east and beyond the railway, lies the Aston Lodge Park development. Several hundred modern homes accessed directly off the Uttoxeter Road.

There are green spaces evident across the area and other green space evident at Stone Cricket Club situated on the Lichfield Road and Little Stoke Cricket and Bowls Clubs on the Uttoxeter Road.

The area is served by St Michael's C of E first school situated on Weavers Lane off the Lichfield Road. There is also a GP surgery just south of the town centre itself.

**West of the River:**

This area is bounded by the River Trent to the east and the settlement boundary to the west and falls within the Walton settlement. The main road arteries are the A34 that bisects the area north to south and the Eccleshall road running east to west. The area is largely residential and consists for the most part of post-war housing developments however the northern boundary is formed by Stone Golf Club and the southern boundary by the growing Stone Business Park.

There are a number of Victorian properties along the Stafford Road though for the most part Walton comprises post-war housing developments. The older housing stock is on the northern section of the A34 (The Fillybrooks) and the Eccleshall Road close to the A34. All are set back from the road and often enjoy sizeable gardens.

Later developments continue to expand the settlement beyond its original boundaries. There are sizable more mature developments between the river and the A34 and between the A34 and the settlement boundary, each comprising several hundred homes and a number of

apartments. An in fill development of modern housing is currently being built just west of the A34.

Walton is expected to see considerable further housing development along its western boundary in the coming years with the designation of more than 500 additional houses specified in the Local Plan.

There are a number of green spaces evident and a small park and playground on Whitemill Lane. There are 5 Listed Buildings and monuments in the area that are clustered around the Stafford Road.

The area is served by Manor Hill and Pirehill First Schools (on Manor Rise and Pirehill Lane respectively) and Walton Priory Middle School on Beacon Rise.

There are also three small retail parades in Walton, one on the Eccleshall Road just west of the A34, one on Pirehill Lane and the third at the Stafford Road roundabout. Stone Community Fire Station lies on the A34 north of Stafford Road.

### **River and Canal Corridor:**

The river and canal corridor runs north-south through Stone and forms in itself a distinctive character area.

To its west lies ribbon housing development and the A34, to the east the canal and close to the town centre is mostly older housing stock and further north from the town centre more modern developments.

The corridor itself comprises valued green space, including grazing land, meadowland, designated nature reserves and Westbridge Park which was gifted to the people of Stone by Joules Brewery in 1951 and is used extensively for leisure and recreation purposes. The Park hosts a number of successful annual festivals and is also home to Stone Canoe Club and Scouts and Guiding.

Much of the river corridor is on designated flood plain.

The Trent and Mersey Canal has played an important role in the town's development, and continues to do so to this day. The first meeting of the Grand Trunk Canal Company (later to become the Trent and Mersey Canal Company) was held in the Crown Inn on 10<sup>th</sup> June 1766. At the meeting, James Brindley was appointed Surveyor-General, John Sparrow was appointed

Clerk, and Josiah Wedgwood Treasurer. The following year (1767), it was decided to locate the headquarters of the company in the town. The arrival of the canal in Stone changed the town, to quote a contemporary source, "from a sleepy market town into a busy inland sea port". Today, the canal forms a key element of Stone's leisure and tourism offer, and is an important part of the town's infrastructure. The canal corridor also supports a range of employment opportunities, including at the Grade II Listed Grand Trunk Wharf, which still provides boat repair services.

## **Gateways and Views:**

Stone is a town acknowledged for the quality of its built heritage, unique positioning alongside river and canal, excellent leisure and recreation facilities and a growing tourism sector. Its successful development and realisation of our vision will depend to an important degree upon conserving and enhancing the local character and the views in and around its town centre.

To this end it is possible to identify a number of important gateways to the Centre, each requiring specific recognition and consideration.

### **Gateway 1: Stafford Road (A520)**

The Stafford Road is the main gateway to the Town from the South (Stafford via the A34) and West (Eccleshall Road) and arguably the most heavily used.

The road crosses the River Trent and affords most important views along the river, across the river flood plain and meadows to the north; and across the green expanse of Westbridge Park to the south.

Particularly noteworthy are the impressive views from the road of the roof lines of the town centre straight ahead and those across Westbridge Park to the Grade II Listed Moorings and to the tower of the Grade II\* Listed Church of St Michael.

### **Gateway 2: Longton Road (A520)**

The Longton Road is the main gateway to the Town from the north east and is also heavily used.

The road reaches the Town Centre via the northern boundary of the Stone Town Conservation Area having passed by the adjacent Moddershall Valley Conservation Area.

As it enters the town centre the road affords important views of parts of Victorian Stone and in particular the old Co-op bakery building and the imposing Church of St John (Grade II Listed and currently unused).

### **Gateway 3: Lichfield Road**

The Lichfield Road is the main entrance from Lichfield and enters via the southern residential area.

The road reaches the town centre as Lichfield Street as it passes imposing Georgian and Victorian housing stock and some independent retail stores and it affords important views across the town centre and of the built heritage of the High Street including several Grade II Listed buildings.

### **Gateway 4: Railway Station/Station Approach**

Stone's mid Victorian railway station is itself Grade II Listed and affords an interesting entrance to the Town Centre for the increasing number of railway travellers from as far away as London to the south and Manchester and Crewe to the north.

It has an imposing and attractive facade and is positioned at the head of Station Approach, a road that leads directly into the town centre at Granville Square passing by for the most part Victorian housing stock and St Dominic's School and Church (Grade II Listed).

### **Gateway 5: Trent and Mersey Canal**

The Trent and Mersey Canal forms the boundary of the town centre running north to south and affords an interesting entrance to the town centre for the growing numbers of canal boat tourists.

The southern approach affords attractive views over Westbridge Park to the west and the Moorings (Grade II Listed) to the east. The northern approach enters the Town alongside the old wharves, many now light industrial units and several Grade II Listed buildings and monuments.

The canal passes numerous buildings and spaces of historic interest that are often listed building or places of townscape merit including the Star Inn, the Crown Wharf, the old Workhouse (now residential apartments), the old Joules Brewery Warehouse and the canal-side boatyards, several of which are also Grade II Listed.

## **Markets:**

Stone has a long history of being a market town, having been granted a market Charter by King Henry III in 1251. The town still had a livestock market up until its closure in the early 90's. For the past 12 years, the Farmers market has provided a vibrant street theatre on the first Saturday of every month with over 50 traders regularly attending. Currently the town's market days are Tuesdays, Fridays and Saturdays with average number of stalls being 5, 7, and 4 respectively. Every third Saturday of the month there is a Craft and Collectables market.

The Street theatre that is created by the Farmers Market is now a significant feature in the economy of the town, drawing people into the High Street and facilitating a sales peak for the local retailers. The many food stalls participating help to reinforce the Town's credentials as a destination for food, drink and leisure activities. It is an aspiration to build on this success and encourage greater participation in the regular weekly markets to provide greater reason to shop in the High Street. In growing these weekly markets care must be taken to encourage complimentary offerings to the permanent retailers rather than competitive.

We believe an opportunity exists to grow the speciality markets, such as a Continental market, spring themed market, and Christmas Market.

## **Well-Being:**

The importance of well-being or quality of life for Stone residents was made clear in the Neighbourhood Plan public consultation, when residents were invited to put forward their views about their town. The link between well-being green infrastructure and recreation with free access to open green space is highly valued. Westbridge Park in the middle of the town is of particular importance and the term used most describing it was "our village green". Local facilities such as play and recreation areas for young people are under-provided in Stone and those that do exist are poorly equipped. Westbridge Park should be the natural location for such investment.

The park is used by large groups of young people who congregate there particularly in the summer months playing games and enjoying their surroundings, it's also popular for families, young children learning to ride their bicycles, dog walking, picnics and relaxing by the canal and river, a number of running clubs and Stone Ramblers use Westbridge Park and the two annual festivals held there attract visitors from a large area. The preparation for the summer festival is enjoyed by many community groups and schools building and making the floats and growing

and producing fruit and vegetables for the festival. The festival promotes a general feeling of wellbeing within the community throughout the enormous section of the population of the town.

Stone is home to three dental surgeries, two opticians, a number of chiropodists, chiropractors, physiotherapists and two GP's surgeries with a third close by in Barlaston, there are many complaints of difficulty in getting doctor's appointments, there is an obvious need for more doctors.

Sports facilities are sparse with no league team football played in Stone, unlike rugby, netball, cricket and hockey, which contribute to the health and wellbeing of many team members of all ages. There are a number of private golf courses close to the town and three outdoor bowling greens, plus a private tennis and squash club. Alleynes High school provides indoor facilities such as squash, badminton and an indoor swimming pool used by schools and members of the public, recently St Dominic's Priory School has enjoyed great success in indoor rowing.

Stone is home to a considerable number of privately owned retirement apartments and the U3A offers a number of recreational activities held in local community buildings specifically aimed at an older generation. It is hoped that eventually all ages will be provided for with the improvement of the local environment and an increase in recreational resources to benefit the health and wellbeing of local residents.

## **Movement and Legibility:**

Pedestrian movement across the town could be improved and enhanced through taking advantage of green infrastructure, creation of circular walks and links to the Trent and Mersey Canal and River Trent, and creation of links to the key gateways outlined above.

Signage whether that be for road users or pedestrians, is a vital part of making a town like Stone, warm, welcoming and able to create the buzz of interest and intrigue that is required to increase footfall and visitor numbers.

Currently Stone is poorly placed in this respect and the current levels of signage are neither:

- Intuitive enough.
- Clear enough.
- In the correct locations.

All of the above need to be addressed and by example, we have illustrated other towns of similar sizes who have a more creative and welcoming presence from which we can learn. However, it is acknowledged that these are issues that will not be addressed by policies within the Neighbourhood Plan, and Stone Town Council will work with partners in order to improve matters.

### **Current Position:**

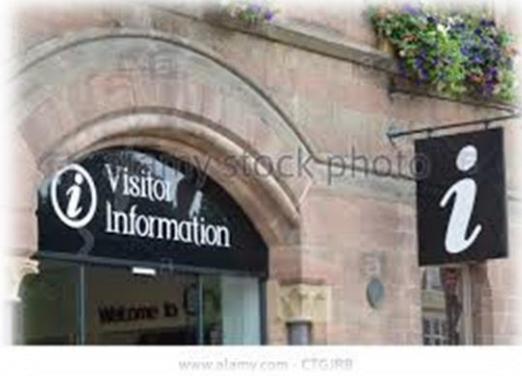
By virtue of the A34 and A51 bypassing Stone, it is all far too easy to drive by Stone and not even have desire to visit the town.

On the main through routes we are lacking in luring people in by virtue of position (close to hedges) and being brown also blend in with foliage as well as having new housing signs attached!. The impact level is low and does not seem very inviting (perhaps the Colour?) and nor do we thank them for visiting and please come back again. The large Green sign is again uninspiring although it has a small Town Centre Parking sign beneath it.



The two roundabouts that you hit when entering the town from either the south on A34 or from the north down the A34 are both bland and unappealing bar when the wild flowers are out on the southern one in the summer and the “Welcome to Stone” signs are either old, small or insufficient hence why people will just stay on the A34 and carry along their way.

In the town there is a lack of signage on the outskirts as to what’s in Stone and once inside the town again signs are haphazard and people amble and roam with a lack of direction. We need signs like those below:



Future direction:

We need:

- New “wow factor” signage when coming into Stone along A34 to make people want to come off Walton or Whitebridge roundabouts.
- Clear direction and heritage signs in the town and on outskirts pushing people into the central hub.
- Clear Car Parking signage.
- Definitive Visitor Information signs.
- Things you didn't perhaps know about Stone - Information Boards for public to stop and review.
- Promote and deliver heritage tours and walks to celebrate the diverse history of Stone and the heritage assets.



## Vision and Aims:

### VISION FOR STONE:

In 2031, Stone will be notable as a thriving market town alongside river and canal and with an attractive and accessible historic centre, a high quality network of green space, a wide range of leisure and recreational activities, a successful tourism sector, high quality local services and a diversity of local employment opportunities.

SA1: Improve the economic viability of the High Street and the town centre by encouraging and incentivising new businesses, enabling local businesses to thrive and providing a diverse range of shopping and other services.

SA2: Preserve and enhance the special historic character and heritage assets of Stone by supporting initiatives to repair, refurbish and re-use historic buildings and to improve the quality of the environment.

SA3: Identify and designate important areas of local green space and develop a green infrastructure strategy to protect and improve those areas.

SA4: Support initiatives for the review of the town's transport and traffic needs, and support relevant actions to address those needs.

SA5: Improve pedestrian and cycle links and accessibility within Stone and to surrounding destinations, particularly the canal and river meadows.

SA6: Protect and improve leisure, cultural and sports facilities and improve community access to those facilities.

SA7: Support initiatives for the enhancement of essential local community facilities, including medical and educational facilities as appropriate, ensuring that they are sustainable and fit for purpose.

SA8: Ensure that new developments in Stone preserve and enhance the town's historic character and improve the quality of the natural and built environment.

## **Land Use Policies:**

## **Growth Strategy:**

The Growth Strategy for Stone has three key elements:

1. Housing growth to cater for a growing and ageing population, whilst addressing local housing needs;
2. Reinforcing Stone Town Centre's role as a place to visit, shop, and access high quality local services; and
3. Deliver new high quality green infrastructure, and preserve and enhance key local environmental assets.

The Growth Strategy will be delivered through:

- Strategic housing site allocations through the Local Plan (Plan for Stafford Borough), and infill opportunities within the urban envelope;
- A series of enabling policies; and
- The development of a Neighbourhood Development Order for Stone Town Centre.

Identified policy areas are as follows:

1. Housing: to ensure that identified local housing needs are addressed, and that new homes are delivered to high standards of design and sustainability;
2. Business and Employment: to enable economic diversification, and reinforce the role of Stone Town Centre; and
3. Community Assets and Facilities: to ensure that growth in Stone is supported by high quality facilities and environmental assets.

## **Housing:**

A number of sites for new housing have been identified through the Local Plan (Plan for Stafford Borough) process (see SP7 – Supporting the Location of New Development), and these strategic allocations will deliver in excess of 500 homes over the plan period. It is also anticipated that smaller infill opportunities will arise. The purpose of the housing policies is to

ensure that local housing needs are addressed as per Policy Stone 1 – Stone Town, and Policy Stone 2 – West and South of Stone, of the Local Plan, and that high standards of design and sustainability are secured.

#### Policy H1: Housing Tenures and Types

A range of housing needs have been identified through the Local Plan process, and in terms of housing types and tenures, development proposals must address these. Identified needs include:

- Affordable housing, including homes for social rent, affordable rent, shared ownership, and starter homes; and
- Housing for the older population such as supported housing, and downsizing and rightsizing opportunities.

House types should include semi-detached and terraced housing.

#### Rationale:

To address identified local housing needs, and provide a balanced mix of new homes, in a planned, well-designed and sustainable manner, as outlined by strategic policies within the Local Plan (Plan for Stafford Borough), and supporting evidence such as the 'Stone Rural Hub Town Profile'.

\*

Good design is indivisible from good planning and achieving sustainable development, and the National Planning Policy Framework recognises that well-designed buildings and places improve the quality of people's lives and that it is a core planning principle to achieve good design.

#### Policy H2: Housing Design

New development in Stone must deliver high quality design. In order to achieve this, new development must accord with the following:

- Respond to the existing character of the town, and Conservation Area, by providing active frontages to streets and spaces and responding to nearby development in terms of enclosure and degree of set-back;
- Be well integrated with its surroundings by reinforcing existing connections and

creation of new ones, while respecting local character and appearance;

- Provide convenient access to community services and facilities;
- Have good access to public transport or otherwise help reduce car dependency;
- Create a place with a locally inspired or distinctive character, complementing the existing character;
- Respect and enhance local topography, landscape and water features, trees and plants, wildlife habitats, existing buildings, site orientation and microclimate;
- Provide buildings, landscaping and planting that create attractive streets and spaces;
- Take advantage and respect views into and out of sites in order to make the development easy to access and navigate through;
- Provide streets that encourage low vehicle speeds and which can function as safe, social spaces;
- Integrate car parking within landscaping so that it does not dominate the streets, and ensure that car parking requirements can be catered for on plot;
- Clearly distinguish between public and private spaces, for example by avoiding placing rear gardens next to road frontages;
- Provide convenient, well-screened storage space for bins and recycling, and for bicycles and motor vehicles;
- Be of an appropriate scale and density in relation to the wider town context;
- Include high quality and recycled materials which complement those used in the surrounding area; and
- Not create unnecessary light pollution by having bright, permanently lit areas at night.

Innovative design solutions will be welcomed.

Development of infill housing within large existing plots ('garden grabbing') will be resisted where such plots have been identified as playing an important role in the character of a particular area (e.g. within the identified Special Character Areas).

The Design and Access Statement accompanying relevant planning applications must explain how the proposed development addresses the above, and how the design responds to the specific site and context.

Rationale:

Good design will ensure that proposed developments are sustainable, and will enhance the character and appearance of the area of Stone and the Conservation Area, and will support the

aims of strategic policies within the Local Plan – for example Policy Stone 1 and Policy Stone 2 – and responds to the findings of the ‘Stone Historic Character Assessment’.

## **Business and Employment:**

It is recognised that Stone is located between two major economic centres: the Potteries conurbation, and the county town of Stafford. However, Stone is home to a diverse business base, and Stone Town Centre will continue to play a vital role in driving the local economy. Business and employment policies are concerned with responding to changes in work patterns, and reinforcing the role of Stone Town Centre.

### **Policy BE1: Small Home Based Business**

Policy BE1 is designed to encourage economic diversification and sustainable patterns of development. Support will be provided for:

- Proposals for the conversion or extension of existing residential properties or the development of new buildings within a residential plot for commercial uses to provide opportunities for new start-up businesses.
- The expansion and diversification of existing businesses where it can be demonstrated that proposals are compatible with residential uses, will not impact adversely on residential amenity, and do not contribute to an over-intensification of business uses within established residential areas.

New housing will be encouraged to include opportunities for home working and opportunities to cater for home based business, where it can be demonstrated that the principles set out in Policy H2 will not be compromised.

#### **Rationale:**

To encourage sustainable patterns of development, and support economic diversification in order to reduce the high levels of commuting identified in the ‘Stone Rural Hub Town Profile’, and Local Plan evidence base.

## Policy BE2: Stone Town Centre and Local Retailing

The Neighbourhood Plan seeks to maintain and enhance the vitality and viability of Stone Town Centre (as defined on the Proposals Plan), and this will be achieved by:

- Proposals for residential use at ground floor level within the Primary and Secondary Frontages will not be supported;
- Any non-A1 use must be complementary to adjacent shopping uses in terms of its operational characteristics and retain a display frontage appropriate to the shopping area;
- Major town centre use proposals (including large extensions to existing stores) of 200m<sup>2</sup> (net sales area for A1 usage) or more outside of the defined town centre must comply with the sequential approach to site selection, and applicants must demonstrate that there are no suitable and available sites within the defined centre that could accommodate such development. Such proposals should also be supported by an Economic Impact Assessment;
- Planning permission will be granted for accessible, edge-of-centre sites that relate well to the town centre and are accessible by public transport, subject to other requirements of this Plan. Out-of-centre proposals are not sustainable and will not be supported unless there are no suitable town centre or edge-of-centre sites available;
- Planning permission will be granted for retail, leisure, and other commercial development of a scale and type appropriate to the role and function of the town centre;
- Adequate car parking facilities in suitable locations must be provided to serve town centre developments; they must also be accessible via public transport, walking, and cycling, and must also be well-designed and appropriately landscaped;
- Town centre regeneration proposals must seek to connect to, and where appropriate, improve existing or proposed Public Rights of Way, and multi-user trails; and
- Active ground floor frontages (such as doors and windows) must be created and maintained through uses appropriate to the town centre.

This policy and other measures will be backed by a Neighbourhood Development Order for the town centre (see Section 9).

Rationale:

To ensure the continued vitality and viability of the town centre as a key location for economic growth, a place to visit, and a place to access a range of local services, in accordance with Policy Stone 1 – Stone Town of the Local Plan, and the ‘Stone Rural Hub Town Profile’.

## **Community Assets and Facilities:**

Whilst Stone is catering for growth, it is also important that this is supported by the delivery of, or enabling access to a range of high quality community facilities and open spaces. Policies to support community assets and facilities focus on:

- Local play, sports and recreational facilities;
- Green infrastructure and environmental assets; and
- Community facilities.

### **Policy CAF1: Local Play, Sports and Recreational Facilities**

Access to high quality play, sports and recreational facilities is an important element of sustainability, and residential development proposals must deliver or contribute to such facilities where this is viable and deliverable, in line with Fields In Trust quantity benchmark guidance, as follows:

- 5-10 dwellings: Local Area for Play;
- 10-200 dwellings: Local Area for Play and a Locally Equipped Area for Play;
- 201-500 dwellings: Local Area for Play, a Locally Equipped Area for Play, a contribution to a Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play, and a Multi-Use Games Area; and
- 501+ dwellings: Local Area for Play, a Locally Equipped Area for Play, a Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play, and a Multi-Use Games Area.

Planning applications must also be supported by an assessment of the level of formal outdoor space (including sports facilities) that proposals should deliver, in line with Fields In Trust recommended benchmark guidance.

Rationale:

To ensure that local people have access to a range of high quality sports and recreational facilities, that development proposals provide appropriate provision and support towards new facilities, and enhancements, in accordance with strategic policies within the Local Plan (e.g. Policy 1 – Stone Town, and Policy 2 – West and South of Stone), and Fields in Trust guidance.

Policy CAF2: Green Infrastructure

Access to high quality green spaces and environmental assets is an important element of sustainability, and development proposals must deliver access to, or contribute to enabling access to such assets through s106 of CIL contributions where this viable and deliverable.

Planning applications must also be supported by an assessment of the level of informal outdoor space that proposals should deliver.

When considering planning applications great weight shall be given to preserving and enhancing important green elements (space, trees, etc.) that form part of the overall kinetic and spatial experience of Stone.

Rationale:

To ensure that local people have access to a range of high quality open spaces and environmental assets, and that development proposals provide appropriate provision and support towards delivering or enabling access to such assets.

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Paragraph 70 of the National Planning Policy Framework states that “to deliver the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies and decisions should:

- Plan positively for the provision and use of shared space, community facilities (such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, cultural buildings, public houses, places of worship, and public conveniences) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments;
- Guard against the unnecessary loss of valued facilities and services, particularly where this would reduce the community’s ability to meet its day-to-day needs;
- Ensure that established shops, facilities and services are able to develop and modernise in a way that is sustainable, and retained for the benefit of the community; and

- Ensure an integrated approach to considering the location of housing, economic uses and community facilities and services.

Where a proposal involves a recognised Asset of Community Value as determined by the provisions of the Localism Act 2011, this recognition may be a material consideration in the determination of any planning application related to it.

#### Policy CAF3: Community Assets

A range of community assets have been identified across the neighbourhood area, and where proposals are developed that involve an identified community asset, there will be a presumption against a loss of community value. Therefore:

- If a community asset is to be redeveloped, an appropriate re-provision must be made, either through part of the development proposal, or through an appropriate off-site provision, secured through either s106 contributions or CIL.

#### Rationale:

To ensure the creation of a balanced and sustainable community, and to enable and enhance social inclusion through ensuring access to a wide range of local services and facilities, in accordance with strategic policies within the Local Plan.

#### Policy CAF4: Protected Views and Vistas

Policy CAF4 has been designed to protect and enhance significant local views of important buildings, townscape, and skylines, and to enhance the overall kinetic and spatial experience of built and green environment as you move around Stone.

The following views and vistas have been identified as being locally important:

- Along the River Trent corridor and flood plain;
- From Stafford Road towards the town centre;
- From Westbridge Park to the Moorings and tower of the Church of St Michaels;
- From Longton Road towards various historic buildings, including the Church of St John;
- From Lichfield Road towards the town centre;

- The Station Approach vista;
- Views and vistas along the Trent and Mersey Canal corridor; and
- Views into the urban area from the A34.

The Design and Access Statement that supports planning applications for developments that may affect these views and vistas must demonstrate how the proposal would enhance them.

Rationale:

To improve and enhance important views, vistas and spaces across Stone, in accordance with the 'Stone Historic Character Assessment'.

## **Neighbourhood Development Order (NDO) for Stone Town Centre:**

### **What is a Neighbourhood Development Order?**

A Neighbourhood Development Order can grant planning permission for specific types of development in a specific neighbourhood area. A Neighbourhood Development Order can therefore:

- Apply to a specific site, sites, or wider geographical area;
- Grant planning permission for a certain type or types of development; and
- Grant planning permission outright or subject to conditions.
- A Neighbourhood Development Order can be used to permit:
  - Building operations (e.g. structural alterations, construction, demolition or other works carried out by a builder);
  - Material changes of use of land and buildings; and
  - Engineering operations.
- A Neighbourhood Development Order for Stone Town Centre
  - In order to reinforce Stone Town Centre's role as a place to visit, shop, and access high quality local services, it is proposed to develop a Neighbourhood Development Order.
  - The purposed of the Order will be to underpin the principles within Neighbourhood Plan policies, particularly Policy BE2.