

ECONOMY AND PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 11th September, 2025
Time of Commencement: 7.00 pm

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Present:	Councillor Andrew Parker (Chair)		
Councillors:	Bettley-Smith Burnett-Faulkner Casey-Hulme	Edgington-Plunkett Gorton Grocott	J Tagg J Waring
Apologies:	Councillor(s) Berrisford		
Substitutes:	Councillor Mark Holland		
Officers:	Michelle Hopper Craig Jordan Simon McEneny	Mobile Multi-Functional Manager Service Director - Planning Deputy Chief Executive	
Also in attendance:	Councillor Stephen Sweeney	Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder - Finance, Town Centres and Growth	

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received as listed above.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest stated.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Service Director for Planning advised that the minutes had been amended further to the publication of the agenda to reflect the fact that the hearing sessions referred to in item 4, paragraph 2 concluded on 26th June.

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 19th June, 2025 be agreed as a correct record, subject to the following amendments:

- final sentence of second paragraph to read: *'These sessions commenced in May and were due to conclude on 26th June.'*
- first sentence of third paragraph to read: *'The hearing sessions to date had considered a number of matters including whether the Local Plan was legally compliant, issues around the spatial strategy being promoted, green belt housing and employment requirements as well as climate change.'*

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4. BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN UPDATE

The Service Director for Planning presented the Borough Local Plan update, advising members of requests for further information received from the inspector. Responses were provided by the Council and the fulfilment of its duty to cooperate was acknowledged by the inspector. Additional work had been requested and the intention was for officers to submit the required information by 30th September if not before. A set of modifications to the plan would subsequently be agreed and go out for consultation for a six-week period.

Cllr Edgington-Plunkett wondered about the implications in relation to supplying the additional information requested in the required timeframe.

The Service Director for Planning advised that the Council was relying on external parties who had been identified and contacted. Officers would submit what was deemed appropriate based on the information received and the inspector would let them know if further information was needed.

Cllr Grocott asked if there were any alternatives to the use of green belt as suggested in the plan.

The Service Director for Planning responded that one of the questions the inspector had asked was if the Council was comfortable that the amount of land taken out of the green belt was appropriate and fully justified, which officers were endeavouring to positively respond to.

Cllr Gordon asked if the inspector had issued any recommendations in favour of taking some sites off the draft Plan in addition to any information requested.

The Service Director for Planning confirmed that there were certain sites that the inspector suggested to remove the Plan. As sufficient buffer had been included in the Plan to account for this possibility, looking for additional sites wouldn't be necessary when following the recommendation.

Cllr Holland shared his confidence that the report received was to be perceived positively as it was rare for a local plan to be adopted without any corrections and the take away was that the Plan was sound and would pass the inspection with the introduction of a few modifications. The fulfilment of the Council's duty to cooperate had been successfully demonstrated which was a big plus.

The Deputy Leader added that it was a very encouraging report and that the inspector was on the Council's side willing to see the Plan to go through.

Cllr Gorton raised the fact that national planning policy was undergoing changes and wondered if the grey belt concept which was brought up at a meeting he recently attended had been mentioned by the inspector.

The Service Director for Planning advised that the grey belt was introduced in the last iteration of National Planning Policy Framework which did not apply to the Plan and may be of interest for future plans only.

Cllr Holland added that a sound local plan would give protection to the green belt as currently defined and ensure that inappropriate development would not be permitted in the future regardless of any evolution of the grey belt concept.

Resolved: That the update on the progress of developing a new Local Plan for the Borough be noted.

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5. CIVIC PRIDE (EMPOWERING OUR COMMUNITIES) STRATEGY

The Deputy Leader / Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth introduced the report on the draft Civic Pride (Empowering Our Communities) Strategy 2025-28 aiming to create a strong sense of belonging to and pride in the borough. The Strategy was coming in response to feedback from residents and as a call to arms for people of all ages to get involved

The Mobile Multi-Functional Manager presented the strategy.

Cllr Edgington-Plunkett suggested that a further conversation about how to communicate and get the message out to residents may be appropriate.

Cllr Gorton wondered if there would be a named officer or group assessing the deliverables and taking responsibility for it, as well as how individuals could get involved given that applications would be open to communities only.

The Mobile Multi-Functional Manager advised that equipment would typically be handed over to a group for activities such as litter picking but suggestions for improving the strategy were welcomed and would be considered.

In terms of metrics the plan was to work with Staffordshire County Council and involve as many community groups as possible.

Resolved: That the draft Civic Pride (Empowering Our Communities) Strategy 2025 – 28 be considered and feedback be provided in advance of adoption.

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6. TOWN DEAL AND FUTURE HIGH STREET FUNDS UPDATE

The Deputy Leader / Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth went through the Town Deal and Future High Street Fund Update report noting that most projects had now been delivered or were on their way to be completed.

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that there was an ongoing legal discussion about the maintenance of the new bus entrance at Keele University which was slightly delaying the process.

The Chair asked if any progress was to be reported in relation to Kidsgrove Train Station.

The Deputy Chief Executive responded that a scheme that did not require any remediation works to the ground was now in place, including the refurbishment of the station and car park improvements. It was hoped that an agreement between

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Network Rail and East Midlands Railway would be reached by the end of the month, to be taken to Kids Grove Town Deal Board. The Government had also announced that the fundings made available could now be reallocated with no need to be re-submitted which should help speed up the process.

Cllr Casey-Hulme commented that she had visited the car park and the automatic door openers mentioned at the previous meeting were now operational which she was grateful for. She asked if the car park was now being used more as a result.

The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that the car park usage was slowly increasing, adding that the works in the town centre would ultimately lead to more visitors and bring the figures up even further.

Cllr Grocott thanked officers on behalf of Chesterton Community Centre for the digital roll out and enquired about Knutton Village Hall.

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that planning permissions had been received for both a village hall in Knutton and Aspire residential development. A CIC operator was however required to build the village hall and no one had come forward. A plan B was currently being considered consisting in integrating the building into an enterprise unit facility with community space to be allocated. Three to four units would add to making Knutton attractive to businesses and a small community room activity space could be utilized.

The Deputy Chief Executive added that the photographs requested at the previous meeting would be included in the next edition of the report to be shared with members at the next meeting.

Resolved: That the report on the delivery of the Town Deal and Future High Street Funds projects be noted.

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7. WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair asked what was to be expected from the Planning Enforcement and Car Parking Strategy items scheduled for the next meeting.

The Deputy Chief Executive responded that members had previously raised the question of how planning enforcement was being undertaken. The car parking strategy was centred around the use of Castle Car Park and loss of car parks that had been identified for future sale.

Cllr Gorton asked if the meeting scheduled on 19th March was going ahead.

The Deputy Chief Executive responded that it was as well as a June meeting and the work programme would be updated accordingly.

Resolved: That the work programme be noted.

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8. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no questions received from members of the public.

9. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

**Councillor Andrew Parker
Chair**

Meeting concluded at 7.43 pm