

STRATFORD NEEDS YOU

Tired of seeing your town spoilt by 'improvements'?
You now have the power to do something about it

Stratford residents, at last, can have a real say in the future of our town following the publication today of the draft version of the Neighbourhood Plan for Stratford-upon-Avon. Once finalised the plan will, for the first time, give local people a voice in how the town should develop and be protected.

The Neighbourhood Plan is a central part of the Localism Act which came into effect in April 2012, setting out a series of measures to shift power away from central government and towards local people. It forms a new tier in planning policy, enabling local people to shape the development of their community for the next twenty years.

The Neighbourhood Plan cannot contradict the District Council's Local Plan and National Planning Policy, for example it cannot veto the building of new homes and businesses, but it can dictate important issues; it can set out clearly where they can be built and how they ought to be designed.

After public meetings in 2011, a team of Stratford residents representing 40 different groups and associations within the town volunteered their time to get the Neighbourhood Plan off the ground. Chairman Mark Haselden says "It was important to get a good cross section of the community on the team, so that as many opinions as possible were considered. It hasn't always been easy to agree on issues but we all had a common goal, to make Stratford a better place to be, so with a great deal of discussion and compromise we think we've come up with a plan that has our lovely town's best interests at heart. The next stage involves everyone in Stratford. Please have a look at the Draft Neighbourhood Plan and let us know if you agree with us!"

The team is hoping that locals will read the draft version and give feedback on its proposed recommendations. Once all feedback is returned, the Draft Neighbourhood Plan will be amended as necessary and then the finalised Neighbourhood Plan will be inspected by an independent examiner. If the plan is approved, all those who live and work in Stratford will be invited to vote for or against the Neighbourhood Plan in a local referendum. If the Plan is supported by more than 50% of the votes, the local planning authority must bring it into force.

Mark Haselden says it's vitally important that Stratford has a Neighbourhood Plan, "Without it, the town will be at the mercy of developers, Whitehall, The Town Hall or the District Council; it's about time Stratford residents had a legal say in the town's future."

Adding even more urgency to getting a Neighbourhood Plan in place is the fact that Stratford-on-Avon District Council hasn't yet produced its Core Strategy, the planning guidelines for the next twenty years. It means that there are currently no local rules in place to prevent developers gaining planning permission for developments that are all about maximising profit, leaving us – Stratford residents - to put up with the results. By taking an active part in the Neighbourhood Plan, you can make sure your interests – *Stratford's interests* – are also catered for.

What's in the Draft Neighbourhood Plan

It covers many issues important to the town, such as how best to preserve its character and heritage whilst providing jobs and enough housing, how the Town Centre can be improved and how its retail and tourism needs can be best managed.

A green and leafy Stratford

The easiest issue for the team to agree on was that the Neighbourhood Plan ought to protect and enhance the many parks and open spaces in Stratford, its green spaces being the single most important thing that people like about the town. The Draft goes on to suggest that any new building development should come with a publicly accessible open space, and that all spaces should 'connect' to provide pleasant, joined-up walkways around the town. The team would also like to see a 'built-up area boundary' to curb the creep of urban sprawl and protect the greenbelt around Stratford. The Draft Plan focuses on trees, too – it suggests a tree planting scheme along the main routes into Stratford giving an attractive welcome to the town, and calls for developers to build around mature trees where possible.

A growing Stratford

One of the biggest issues covered by the document is regeneration and land development.

Undoubtedly, Stratford will have to accept future development but the big bonus of having a Neighbourhood Plan is that it can dictate where development is acceptable.

The draft Neighbourhood Plan suggests protection from further housing developments on the town fringes, using current brownfield sites for this purpose instead.

It focuses on the significant part of the town currently used as an industrial area - from Arden Street north to Timothy's Bridge Road, bordered to the West by Mason's Road and to the East by the Birmingham Road (see map 1.1a). The draft Plan suggests that this area could be sensitively designed to provide a mix of small businesses, shops and housing, bringing 'life' back into the town and bringing people nearer to their place of work and to retail and leisure facilities. A major part of this improvement involves the canal area, currently deemed unattractive and unsafe; you might decide that you agree with the proposal to widen the tow path from the town boundary to where it meets the Birmingham road, perhaps including canal-side cafes and seating areas, changing a dark, disused corridor into a pleasant, leafy walkway into town for locals and tourists alike.

Business Park

The question of where to re-site Stratford's current industrial units, and how to accommodate new industry, is also addressed. Whilst none of the team really wanted to see greenfield sites around Stratford being developed, they concluded that allowing a Business Park on the outskirts of town was a better option than allowing housing development because it would be easier to contain its growth, and with better road and rail links, traffic congestion through Stratford would be greatly reduced.

The Draft Neighbourhood Plan identifies three possible sites that could be used for a Business Park (see map 1.1).

Open to discussion

For the first time, Stratford residents have a say in how their town plans its future. The team of forty volunteers have worked for eighteen months to pin down the details of what that plan might be and they now need your help to finalise our first ever Neighbourhood Plan.

If you'd like to know more, come along to the Open Days at Stratford Town Hall on Thursday May 30th and Saturday June 1st, there will be displays of the main issues, and you can chat to members of the working team.

The Draft Neighbourhood Plan is also available to view online at www.xxxxx.com

Nobody loves our town more than the people who live or work here. Let's make sure that we have something for future generations to love too.

Take a look at the Draft Plan and provide your feedback. The future of Stratford is depending on you.