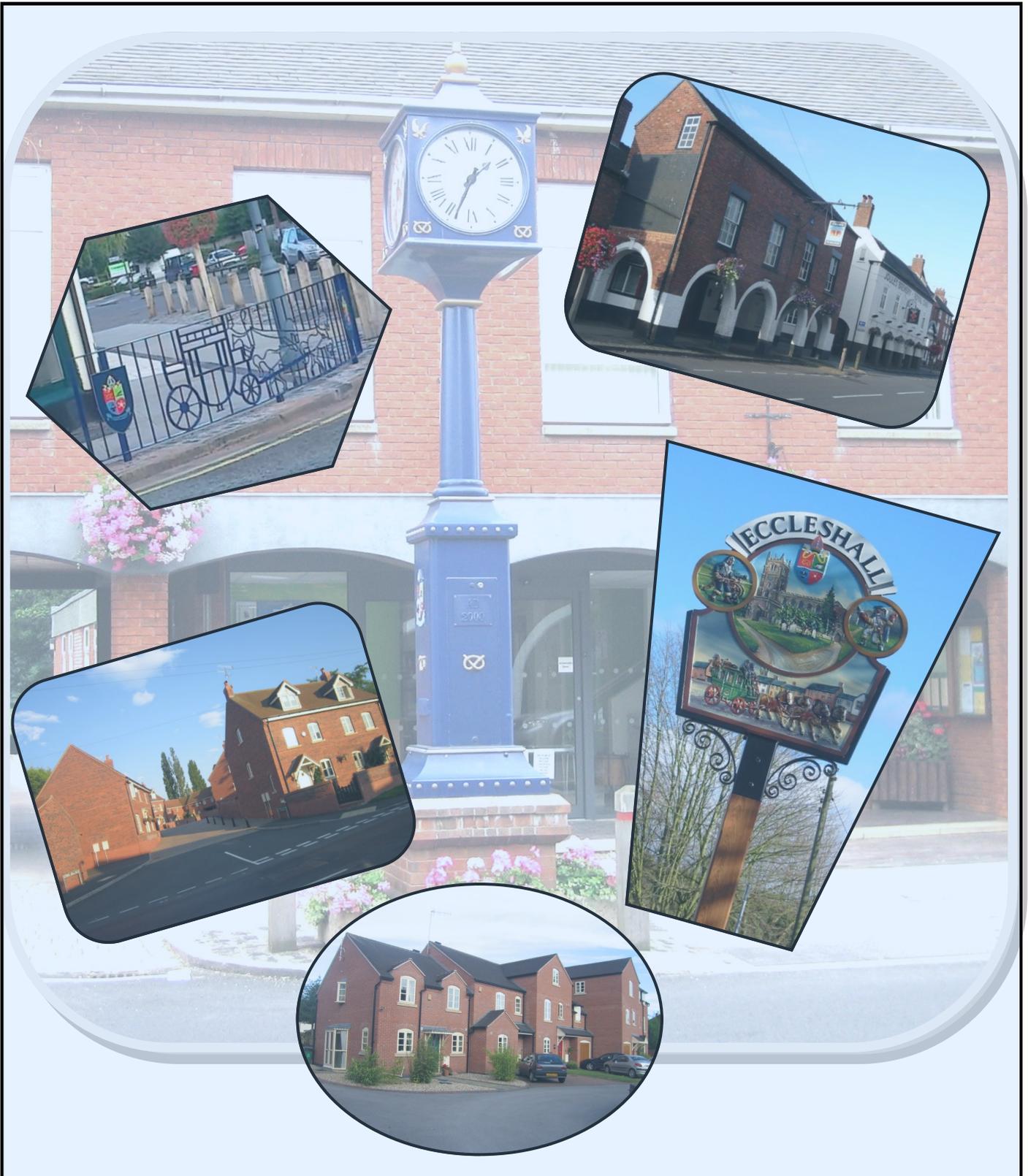




ECCLESHALL PARISH NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN 2011 - 2031



ECCLESHALL NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

FOREWORD

In July 2013, Eccleshall Parish Council was successful with its application to Stafford Borough Council to allow for the preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan. The boundary of the Plan area was the existing Parish Council boundary.

The Parish Council has produced the Eccleshall Neighbourhood Plan with assistance from a Steering Group including Parish Council members, community volunteers, and interested individuals in the community and help from the Borough Council and other agencies.

The Neighbourhood Plan will form the basis for planning decisions applicable to Eccleshall Parish, up to 2031, together with the policies in the National Planning Policy Framework, which embrace the whole of the country and the Plan for Stafford Borough which covers the area controlled by the Borough Council. It is the Borough Council as the Local Planning Authority who determine planning applications but they will have to consider the policies in the Neighbourhood Plan when reaching their decision.

The Eccleshall Neighbourhood Plan reflects community-wide comments, observations and concerns about its future, bringing them together with census information, strategic and statistical evidence into a “living promise” that mirrors the community’s overwhelming desire to make Eccleshall an even better place to live and work, both now and for future generations. The Plan sets out a Vision with Aspirations and planning policy aims to help shape future development in Eccleshall. The policies aim to address key concerns raised by local people including protecting the character of the historic town and surrounding area. Some of the issues raised cannot be adequately addressed by the Neighbourhood Plan but are mentioned in terms of mitigating their impact.

Another issue is the impact of additional traffic in the town and local roads that additional development will create, but the policies for development across the Borough mean that this issue is a cause for serious concern right across the area. The Vision and Aspirations document details items from the responses to the questionnaire and describes changes that the local community wishes to see in Eccleshall.

Other issues of concern are the pressure additional residents will place on services such as the doctors and the school. However, the doctors surgery is controlled independently of the planning system and the education department can make provision by a charge on developers to cover the costs of providing school places for additional pupils.

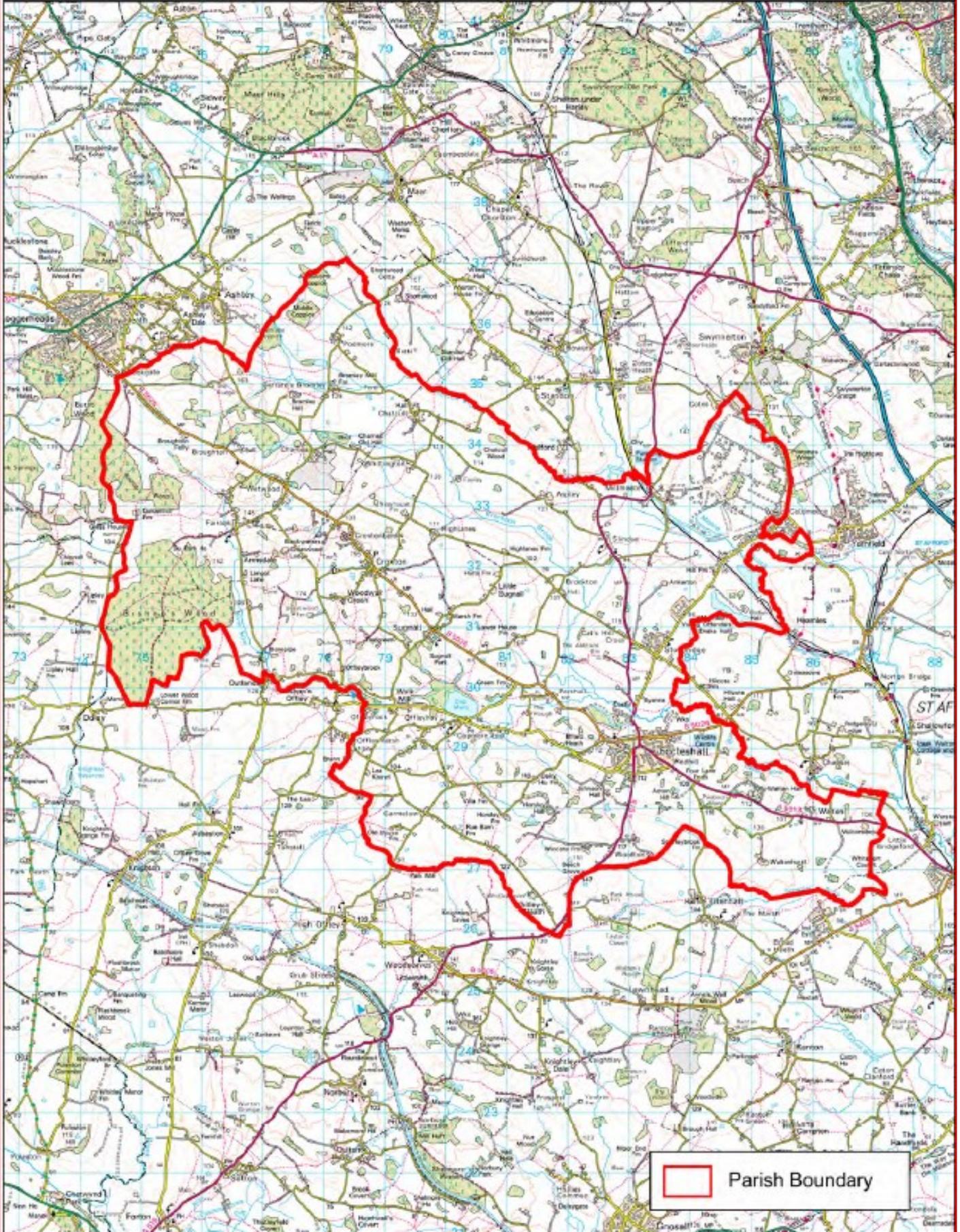
Eccleshall Parish

Not to scale

Date: January 2013



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ECCLESHALL NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

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BACKGROUND

- 1.1. The Neighbourhood Plan process enables communities to shape the environment where they live and inform how development takes place and helps to influence the type, quality and location of that development, ensuring that change brings with it local benefit.
- 1.2. The community of Eccleshall has a strong history of taking local decision making into its own hands. In 2004 the Eccleshall Parish Plan was ratified by the Parish Council and set out a vision and action plan for how the Parish wished to see itself develop. In 2006 the community prepared the Eccleshall Town Design Statement, which was received by the Borough Council as a guide for development in the town.
- 1.3. Neighbourhood Planning now provides an opportunity for the community to have a real say over local decision making, to achieve its long-standing goals through the planning system and address the challenges and opportunities facing the future vitality of the Parish.
- 1.4. The Neighbourhood Plan is based on extensive research and influenced by robust engagement with the local community. In the lead up to the referendum decision makers should consider this to be an important reference point and give it weight as a material consideration in any development planning decisions. When the Plan is adopted it will have very significant weight in the determination of planning applications.

LOCATION AND HISTORY

- 2.1. The Parish of Eccleshall is situated 7 miles to the north west of the County Town of Stafford.
- 2.2. According to the Domesday Book, Eccleshall in 1086 was no more than a small village of about one hundred inhabitants. A few fragments of stone at the base of the tower of the present Parish Church of Holy Trinity suggest that a stone church was in existence about this time and the base of a 10th-century cross still stands outside the church. The oldest part of the church, the pillars and arches of the nave, were begun in 1180 while the remainder of the church was completed during the 13th century, with a fine clerestory being added in the 15th century.
- 2.3. Eccleshall became important as a market town for the surrounding area. In 1153 it was granted the right to hold a weekly market. Around the beginning of the 13th century the village had become a town with the granting of 'Borough' status and by 1259 had obtained a charter to hold an annual fair at Ascensiontide. By the time of the survey of the Bishop's estates in 1298 about five hundred people lived in the village, mainly craftsmen or engaged in agriculture.
- 2.4. To the Bishop of Lichfield, Eccleshall was conveniently situated on the main road between the centres of the diocese in Chester, Lichfield and Coventry. Land was reputedly granted to St Chad and in 1200 Bishop Geoffrey de Muschamp was granted by King John a 'licence to crenellate' a castle. From then on until the 1860s the site would provide a residence for the Bishops of Lichfield.
- 2.5. With the development of turnpike roads in the 18th century, horse drawn coach travel throughout England had become faster and more reliable. With its road Eccleshall became an important stopping point for coaches on several different routes and the town prospered, the inns in particular.
- 2.6. For three centuries leather working and shoe making had been important domestic industries in Eccleshall, but by the end of the 19th century both had almost ceased, with the growth of the mechanised shoe factories in nearby Stafford. Glass production at Bishops Wood was important to the town in the 14th and 15th centuries.

- 2.7. The settlement edge of Eccleshall slowly began to expand around the 1920's. New development at this time comprised small scale, piecemeal development in the form of single dwellings which respected field patterns and boundaries at that time.
- 2.8. During the second world war, a large munitions factory was established on the road towards Swynnerton and military camps were established in the vicinity. After the war, these camps became used for alternative purposes and the Raleigh Hall industrial Estate is one example where the camp was transformed into an industrial estate.
- 2.9. With the addition of larger areas of development, the settlement edge of Eccleshall grew southwards in the 1960's. Growth occurred in the vicinity of Stafford Road forming Green Lane and intensified urban form along Stone Road. Around 1980 to 1990 Eccleshall experienced its most extensive period of growth, expanding the eastern settlement edge significantly. Agricultural land was lost to the formation of large scale residential areas, which gave little consideration to existing field patterns and landscape. Such areas comprised Linacre Road, Claremont Road, Bishops Court and Hartlands Road, further development followed in the form of Green Park, Badgers Croft, Redhills and Fox Hollow.
- 2.10. Today Eccleshall is a vibrant town of 2,800 people and the local population is catered for by a range of essential services. There are three churches, the Parish Church, the Methodist Church and Roman Catholic Church. There is a post office, public library, doctors' surgery, dentist, pharmacy, veterinary surgery and an optician.
- 2.11. The commercial centre of modern Eccleshall is at the cross roads of the High Street – Stone Road with Castle Street – Stafford Street, businesses and homes successfully co-exist throughout the town centre. To cater for the wide range of visitors there is a variety of restaurants, cafés, public houses and approximately three dozen excellent shops. The shops include, among a variety of providers of specialist goods, supermarkets, a butcher and other fresh food providers, a newsagent, take-aways and clothes boutiques, hairdressers and beauticians. This mix makes an attractive draw to shoppers from outside the town. On street parking outside the shops is a facility appreciated by shoppers, although spaces are often at a premium.
- 2.12. In summer thanks to the community's enthusiasm the town is adorned with flowers.
- 2.13. Farming remains a major activity in the area.

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN VISION

- 3.1. The Eccleshall Neighbourhood Plan seeks to promote and allow development of the whole parish area to suit the needs and aspirations of the present and future community in a way which is sensitive and sympathetic to the character of the area as it has evolved to the present day and to ensure that this development is wholly sustainable in the context of existing infrastructure and services.
- 3.2. Future development may be expected to comprise provision of housing of varied types, opportunities for establishment and expansion of local businesses and provision of leisure and recreational facilities to satisfy the needs of the local population.
- 3.3. It should be appreciated that working within the context of the existing infrastructure and character of the town and surroundings will substantially limit the scale of development possible. The evolution of the town to date has maintained a community that can still operate in a successful and largely self-sufficient manner. The nature of the rural hinterland is primarily farming and small hamlets in an attractive landscape and this should be maintained for future generations. Therefore, further change should be gradual, in order that the present broadly satisfactory balance is not lost.

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN STRATEGY

- 4.1. The heart of the town will be prioritised as a thriving centre for local shops, services and community infrastructure. Sustaining local businesses and improving local facilities is a key plan priority. Local community facilities will be supported.
- 4.2. Housing growth is to be accommodated within a Settlement Boundary, revised from the former Residential Development Boundary, to accommodate additional development in accordance with the requirements of the Local Plan. The types of houses are also included in the Policies.
- 4.3. Future growth in the rural areas outside the Settlement Boundary will not be supported by the community. However, there was support for small scale development in Croxton but little support for any development in the other hamlets in the Parish.
- 4.4. Important green spaces are to be protected within the town and a country park is promoted along River Sow through Eccleshall. The Country Park is more fully described under Aspirations.
- 4.5. Green spaces and important views in the countryside are identified in the Stafford Borough Historic Environment Character Assessment, in particular Appendix 3, which describes the historic character of the landscape around Eccleshall and formed part of the evidence base for Plan for Stafford Borough. The Plan provides adequate policies to protect this environment.
- 4.6. The Neighbourhood Plan has identified that infrastructure improvements or other measures will be required to support additional employment space at Raleigh Hall. Improved walking and cycling connections are promoted as necessary to support new developments where appropriate.

ECCLESHALL NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN POLICIES - 2011 - 2031

5. INTRODUCTION

5.1 Planning decisions are guided by policies in the Plan for Stafford Borough, which is referred to when planning applications are made to Stafford Borough Council. The Localism Act 2011, however, allows communities to develop their own policies, which will form part of the development plan for the area, provided that they are based on sound evidence, community input and proper principles of planning. Policies have been developed by Eccleshall Parish Council, which seek to influence planning and development outcomes in order that they help to achieve the vision for Eccleshall Parish. The Neighbourhood Plan must, with due consideration to the basic conditions set out within legislation, have regard to national policies and advice; and be in general conformity with the strategic policies set out within the Plan for Stafford Borough.

5.2 In line with the principles of sustainable development, which require that planning addresses environmental, social and economic issues, the main policy areas that are of most concern to local residents are specified as follows:-

- Housing
- Traffic and Parking
- Green Space
- Historic Fabric

6. HOUSING

6.1 The Plan for Stafford Borough adopted in June 2014, sets the development strategy for the Borough. It plans for 10,000 new houses during the Plan period. These houses will be delivered primarily at the two main settlements of Stafford and Stone (accounting for 8,000 units). 1,200 units in total will be provided in the “Key Service Villages” and 800 units will be delivered in the remaining rural areas.

6.2 Eccleshall is one of the 11 Key Service Villages identified in the Plan for Stafford Borough. A key element of The Plan for Stafford Borough is that new settlement boundaries will be established for each of the Key Service Villages to provide sufficient scope for growth and development, to support Spatial Principal 3. New settlement boundaries are to be defined through Neighbourhood Plans or the Site Allocations Development Plan document.

6.3 The Plan for Stafford Borough states that development proposals should maximise the use of brownfield redevelopment sites within the Key Service Villages to reduce the need for greenfield sites. In Eccleshall, the only brownfield site for consideration is the site of a former gas works where the land is heavily contaminated. Therefore, edge of settlement greenfield sites have had to be considered for new housing.

6.4 The Settlement Boundary for Eccleshall has been defined in accordance with Spatial Principal 7 of The Plan for Stafford Borough and developed as part of the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan with input from the local community. The settlement boundary (see Map 1) is developed using the former Residential Development Boundary, which was established through the previous Stafford Borough Local Plan 2001. The defined settlement boundary provides developers and the general public with a clear indication where residential development and possible employment development will be acceptable.

6.5 The settlement boundary incorporates several areas of land which are proposed for new development, these are shown on the settlement boundary map. These sites were assessed as being the most suitable sites for development. The Neighbourhood Plan Group considered the suitability of a range of different sites around the edge of Eccleshall in coming to this conclusion. For each site the following information was collected and assessed:-

- ◇ A Site Allocation plan, identifying the overall extent of the land proposed for development.
- ◇ An explanation of the 'Key Considerations' affecting the site. These typically include issues such as the landscape within the site, views to the site and potential connections to the surrounding area.

The assessment of all the sites can be viewed on the Parish Council website:- www.eccleshallparishcouncil.org.

- 6.6. The consultation showed that the residents of Eccleshall are positive about further housing development and accept that a supply of housing is needed to meet the needs of present and future generations. However, 36% of respondents indicated a preference for sites of less than 50 dwellings and 34.5% less than 100 dwellings, this has informed the decision to include specific areas within the settlement boundary for smaller developments. The area covered by the Settlement Boundary provides for an additional 13.91 hectares of land available for development. It is believed this gives a realistic amount of land for new housing development to meet adequately the demands for additional residential building in accordance with the Plan for Stafford Borough without any new potential developments overwhelming the existing town.
- 6.7. The number of new houses on the areas of land identified for building has been calculated at 325 in total (this number includes 212 houses which already have outline planning permission) based on 25 dwellings per hectare on those sites outside the original Residential Development Boundary and site number 10, which already has outline planning permission. (See the Map of sites surveyed in the Evidence Base document page 3). Although the density is a lower figure than used by the Borough Council in preparing its Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment, it is believed to be more appropriate to the more rural character of Eccleshall and reflects the low density of housing proposed on the site off Stafford Road, which has already received outline planning permission.

POLICY 1 – HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

The Eccleshall Settlement Boundary has been defined and is indicated on map number 1. Proposals for new housing development within the defined settlement boundary will be supported.

- 6.8 The Plan for Stafford Borough requires residential developments to provide 40% affordable units on sites in Eccleshall of 12 or more dwellings. The report issued following the Housing Needs Survey of Eccleshall Parish undertaken in 2012 by Housing Plus and Stafford and Rural Homes identified a need for new homes for local people. This was further emphasised by the consultation results, which showed a significant requirement for affordable homes in the Parish.
- 6.9 The Census information 2011 and the Health and Wellbeing District Profile for Stafford Borough 2014 indicate that the average age of residents in Eccleshall is higher than in Stafford Borough and the wider area. Therefore, there appears to be a requirement for smaller homes and bungalows to enable people to downsize and encourage young people and families to purchase homes in the Parish, thereby decreasing the average age of the residents of Eccleshall.
- 6.10 The consultations undertaken for the Neighbourhood Plan identified strong support for the provision of 3 bedroom houses and 2 bedroom bungalows, with a preference for houses to be available on the open market. 50% of respondents indicated a preference for these size and types of dwellings. The Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2012 identified Eccleshall as having a high percentage of Council Tax Band F properties in relation to other parishes in the Borough. Concern was also expressed through the consultation that there are not enough affordable homes for first time buyers, especially young people.

POLICY 2 – HOUSING TYPES

To support the aspirations of the local Parish, new housing developments should seek to provide a mix of market and affordable houses. Self-build housing will be supported. The provision of 3 bedroom houses and 2 bedroom bungalows within housing developments will be supported.

7 TRAFFIC AND PARKING

- 7.1 Eccleshall is a rural Parish at the convergence of five busy roads. They are the A519 between Newcastle and Newport, the B5026 between Stone and Loggerheads and the A5013 from Eccleshall to Stafford and the M6, junction 14. These roads converge in the middle of the town at two mini-roundabouts. Eccleshall is the only Key Service Village in Stafford Borough where more than one major route passes through the centre of the town.
- 7.2 Hence, traffic is a major factor for the residents of the town. The town centre can become particularly congested at certain times, mainly due to the number of HGVs from a distribution depot of Raleigh Hall going to junction 14 of the M6 and large vehicles sometimes being unable to pass each other in the High Street. The adverse effects of HGV traffic through Eccleshall are significant and traffic congestion is caused at various times when vehicles cannot pass unobstructed through the town.
- 7.3 There is also a lack of dedicated car parking provision in Eccleshall, which contributes to this issue. The car parking each side of the High Street is essential to the success of the shops and businesses. Defined parking bays would help to achieve more appropriate use of the space available.
- 7.4 The only dedicated public car park is a pay and display car park at the Co-operative supermarket. Additional public car parking within or suitably close to the town centre would be of great benefit to the town.
- 7.5 The only form of public transport available in Eccleshall Parish is by bus, with the only regular bus services travelling to Stafford and a recently introduced subsidised service to Stone hourly. During school terms, buses are also used to convey schoolchildren to and from the local High Schools and public schools. For most people living in the parish, however, the car has become the principal mode of transport, even for some of the shortest journeys, which exacerbates the traffic congestion in the town. New development should encourage short journeys by walking, cycling or other means by creating more appropriate routes that do not involve using the car.

POLICY 3 – TRAFFIC AND PARKING

Major development proposals (as defined by the Town and Country Planning Act) should:

- 1. Identify the realistic level of traffic they are likely to generate. They must assess the potential impact of this traffic on existing traffic, pedestrians, cyclists, road safety, parking and congestion within the parish and include measures to mitigate harm.*
- 2. Maximise opportunities to walk and cycle, including between Eccleshall town and the rest of the Parish. The linking of new and existing pedestrian and cycle routes to Green Spaces will be supported.*

8. LOCAL GREEN SPACE

- 8.1 The Parish has some 8100 hectares of mainly agricultural land, including Sites of Biological Importance and Sites of Special Scientific Interest. The rural areas and the special sites of importance and interest are felt to be adequately protected by the Plan for Stafford Borough, which will preclude development in these areas except in special circumstances.

- 8.2 There is a shortage of publicly accessible green space in the town as shown on Map 2 and there is no support for the loss of any public green space. Half the respondents wanted more accessible green space, including additional facilities for children and teenagers. Estates in Eccleshall were erected with little consideration of open spaces. These include Churchfield Estate, Linacre Estate, Hartlands Road and Badgers Croft, where there is very little open space, but at Bishops Court an area of 0.34 hectares was provided which is the only significant open space on any estate in Eccleshall. These important areas of green space are identified on Map 2 and must be protected to ensure that they remain to the benefit of the community.
- 8.3 The only other accessible spaces are the numerous public footpaths throughout the Parish most of which are well used by the local population and other walkers from outside the area.
- 8.4 The Mid West Stafford Market Towns Plan (2004) identified a requirement in Eccleshall for youth facilities. The Open Space, Sport and Recreation Assessment update 2013 commissioned by Stafford Borough Council indicated that compared to quantity standards, Eccleshall had a significant deficit of certain facilities and identified the priority needs for Eccleshall as:-
- Additional and better children's play facilities
 - Teenage Facilities
 - A potential need for a bowling green in the town to serve the north-west planning area of Stafford Borough.
- 8.5 The report identified a deficit of multi-functional green space and the audit classed the existing green space as high quality in terms of physical access and maintenance, but of low value for recreational purposes, as a contribution to local amenity or play value for children. The report indicated that it was desirable to maximise access to the countryside around the town. The audit classed the Beech Road Play Area as low quality and low value, having only six items of play equipment and not easily accessible, being located in the middle of a housing area to the south of the town centre and at the end of a cul-de-sac, with no signage to indicate its existence.

POLICY 4 – LOCAL GREEN SPACE

- ◆ ***Four sites are identified on Map 2 as Local Green Space. No development will take place on these sites, other than in very special circumstances.***

9. HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

- 9.1. The Parish of Eccleshall has a rich history based on agriculture, its weekly market, the presence of the Bishops of Lichfield and the coaching route between London and Chester. There are three Conservation Areas in the Parish, Eccleshall Town, Walk Mill and Offley Brook. There are also 117 Listed Structures. The Eccleshall Design Statement, produced in 2006, details a brief history of the town and describes those characteristics that are important features of the town, giving Planning Considerations and Guidelines for Building Development. The document has been updated to refer to current documents rather than the out of date documents referred to in the original Design Statement.
- 9.2. Residents of the town expressed the opinion that future development should reflect the character of the town, using traditional styles with sympathetic building materials. Signage, advertising and street furniture should respect the locality using traditional materials and colours. Publicly maintained street furniture is predominantly painted blue which gives a harmony to the area.

POLICY 5 – HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

New development should be designed to respect the existing heritage of Eccleshall. To maintain the town's distinctive character and local architecture, applicants should demonstrate that they have considered the Eccleshall Design Statement to help inform the design process.

ASPIRATIONS

10. INTRODUCTION

10.1. In considering all the aspects of these policies, several matters were raised that have led to the preparation of a list of aspirations of the local community which although are not planning policies, indicate things that would enhance and preserve the character of the town and the wider Parish. The issues below featured largely in the consultation responses as being important to the future success and prosperity of the Parish and are aspirations which the Parish Council would like to see delivered during the plan period.

- Road infrastructure around the town or an alternative route for heavy goods vehicles
- Improvements to parking facilities within the town.
- Riverside country park area alongside the River Sow
- Footpath on Chester Road to Pershall and the Football Club
- Central reservation and crossing point on Stone Road

11. ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE.

11.1. The volume of traffic through the town, especially HGV's, is a matter of major concern to local residents. This is highlighted in the questionnaire returns and through consultation with parishioners.

11.2. The provision of a by-pass to the east of the town would, in the view of most residents, be the most appropriate solution as it could link the A519 to the north of Eccleshall to the A5013 to the south, connecting with the B5026 along the route. Although it is recognised that the cost of such a road would be expensive, such a by-pass may become essential if the number of vehicles increases substantially and would significantly reduce the numbers of unnecessary traffic coming through the town.

11.3. An alternative could be the improvement of roads from the Swynnerton Road, the C2, to Stone in the east to give a convenient link to the A34 and subsequent access to the M6 for vehicles travelling north and south, as well as east.

12. PARKING.

12.1. There are constant complaints that car parking in the town is inadequate. Eccleshall serves a large rural hinterland where the residents generally use a car to visit town for shopping and the other facilities. Any limit or removal of the street parking would be strongly resisted by residents and businesses as the other major concern is the lack of adequate off street parking in the town. Several options have been explored in the past to provide additional off street parking or better utilise the existing provision. However, without funding from either the Borough or County Council, the desire for additional parking remains an aspiration which cannot yet be met, although the Parish Council continues to explore alternative sources of funding.

13. COUNTRY PARK.

13.1. There is little open space in Eccleshall for a town its size. Similar villages surrounding Stafford have publicly maintained open space which has allowed the provision of parkland and play facilities. In order to help overcome this deficit, a Country Park to give a walk along the bank of the River Sow is proposed.

14. CHESTER ROAD FOOTPATH.

14.1. Of less significance but also important is the provision of a footpath along the B5026 to Pershall,

west of Eccleshall. This would give safe pedestrian access to both the hamlet of Pershall and to the Eccleshall Football Club's ground.

15. CENTRAL RESERVATION. - STONE ROAD

15.1. This aspiration is for a central refuge along the Stone Road in Eccleshall. The Housing Association properties at the Burgage, which is on the north side of the Stone Road, are mainly tenanted by elderly people. They need to cross the Stone Road to reach the single pavement on the south side of the road. In order to assist them to cross the road, a central refuge would provide a place to stop as well as assist as a traffic calming measure along the road.

16. PLAN DELIVERY AND OTHER FACTORS

16.1. It is envisaged that the achievement of the above aspirations will be supported through CIL contributions.

16.2. The Eccleshall Neighbourhood Plan will be delivered until 2031 with different stakeholders and partners. In order to ensure the Neighbourhood Plan is flexible and responsive to socio-economic and environmental changes, the Parish Council accepts that a monitoring and review period will be required to assess the delivery of proposals and policies. There will be three strands of activity which will direct delivery and each is important to shaping Eccleshall in the months and years ahead. These requirements comprise:-

- The Parish Council will liaise with Stafford Borough Council, Staffordshire County Council and external agencies regarding the provision of schools, parking, open space and road infrastructure improvements.
- The Parish Council will seek to be involved with negotiations on planning applications within both the settlement boundary and the parish boundary.
- The Parish Council would welcome joint discussions about developer contributions with Staffordshire County Council, Stafford Borough Council and developers as a result of proposed developments at the earliest opportunity.

MAP 2

Existing Green Spaces

Date: April 2015

Not to scale



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