



By Tim West
Stafford President

STAFFORD CHAMBER OF COMMERCE Business Manifesto

2008-2016

Introduction

FOR more than 17 years the Stafford Chamber has been an influential voice for the local business community.

As well as helping to encourage and shape successfully economic development for the whole Stafford Borough it has represented the private sector on a wide range of economic development partnerships.

Achievements include the creation of small business start-up units at St Albans House, provision of small business grants to boost enterprise development and the creation of new jobs for local people at the groundbreaking Biomass generator in Eccleshall.

The Borough is entering an exciting time of regeneration. Significant housing growth is planned, along with the redevelopment of MOD barracks at Beaconside, expansion of business parks and industrial estates, more office units, new shops and the development of town centre living – including an improved riverscape.

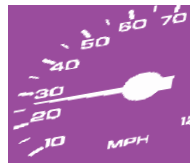
With a good quality of life and a well-educated workforce Stafford Borough is an attractive place to locate a business. However, for businesses to prosper and grow, more needs to be done to:

- Improve the local transport infrastructure
- Promote workforce skills
- Support employment growth
- Support environmental technologies



Stafford is entering an exciting time of regeneration – congestion must not be allowed to choke competitiveness.

Congestion is damaging ability to be competitive



BUSINESSES need reliable and predictable journey times for the transport of people, raw material, products and services. Traffic congestion on local roads and gridlock on the M6 damages productivity, weakens competitiveness and costs each business around £20,000 a year.

To relieve congestion and encourage greater use of public transport, the Chamber calls for:

- Construction of the Stafford Eastern and Southern Distributor Roads to open up new development opportunities and relieve congestion.
- Increased capacity on the M6 through Staffordshire by road

widening – and the use of Active Traffic Management and hard shoulder running to relieve congestion in the short term.

- Improved bus services to link areas where people live and work – particularly in rural areas.
- Urgent provision of additional permanent car parking facilities at Stafford Railway station.
- The rail service from Stone reopened to reduce road traffic congestion.
- A Parkway Station to ensure the Borough's inter-city rail services are maintained and enhanced in the event of a new rail line bypassing Stafford town.

- A net increase in car parking spaces in Stafford and Stone, built to Secure By Design standards, with Pay On Exit facilities.

Our Transport Campaign

Over the next 12 months Stafford Chamber will work with partners at local, regional and national level to lobby for improvements to the Borough's transport infrastructure and services.

We will meet the Minister for Transport, local highways authorities, the Highways Agency and Government Office for the West Midlands to highlight issues that concern our members.

Skills gap must be addressed



SHORTAGES of skilled managers and engineers in the Borough has forced larger employers to recruit staff from South Africa, Eastern Europe and the Far East, or to set up in-house training facilities.

There are also recruitment difficulties in the professional sector, as well as in the office administration, shop floor and warehouse sectors. To address local skills shortages, the Chamber calls for:

- Intense promotion of apprenticeships and 'Train to Gain' to encourage investment in skills development from Level 2 to leadership and management training.
- Discrete funding to prepare people of working age who are not in employment to play a vital role in the local workforce.

- Measures to encourage graduates and talented workers to live and work in the Borough.

Our Skills Campaign

We will maintain dialogue with Advantage West Midlands and Staffordshire Learning and Skills Council to ensure the Regional Skills Strategy will meet business needs in Stafford Borough.

Working closely with Staffordshire Learning and Skills Council, the Chamber will help businesses embrace the new 'Train to Gain' initiative and encourage them to invest in staff training. The Chamber will also meet Connexions, Job Centre Plus and higher and further education providers to promote, through the Local Area Agreement, positive engagement of young people in the workforce.


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SINCE its launch in 2001, the Chamber's Biomass and Renewable Energy Business Support Project, funded by the Borough Council and Advantage West Midlands, has demonstrated that business and the local authority are committed to placing Stafford at the forefront of producing renewable energy.

Our project resulted in new research, development and diversification opportunities for local manufacturing firms and farmers, as well as the construction of a new generator at Eccleshall which will use miscanthus and other biocrops to provide energy for local homes and businesses.

To support further development of

Committed to renewable energy production

environmental technologies in the Borough, the Chamber calls for:

- A clear Government policy and strategy so firms can plan for investment and develop commercially viable products and technologies.
- Commitment and funding to support new sustainable development initiatives, such as

the Eccleshall Biomass generator, and proposals for a renewable technology showcase and training centre at Rodbaston College.

- Clear, readily available support and guidance to help firms reduce their carbon footprint, eliminate waste and prevent pollution.
- Low cost recycling for businesses and better access to recycling facilities.
- Development of a renewable energy cluster in Staffordshire, led by Stafford Borough, to encompass existing good practice and encourage others in this sector to locate to this area.

Our Environment Campaign

The Chamber's new Environmental Policy Committee will provide a voice for business on environmental issues at a local, regional, national and European level.

The Chamber will ensure that member firms are made aware of environmental policy and legislation which affects them, and will signpost them to sources of practical information and support.

Through regular contact with local authorities, our MPs, MEPs, partner organisations and the West Midlands in Europe Office, the Chamber will ensure businesses in the Borough benefit from opportunities created by new environmental technologies.



Fully grown miscanthus grass cultivated by the Biomass Project.

Encouraging new start-ups

TO replace the loss of traditional manufacturing jobs, Stafford Borough needs to encourage new business start-ups, the growth and development of local small businesses and more inward investment.

The Chamber calls for:

- New funding to continue work started under the Stafford Single Regeneration Budget, and supported by Stafford Enterprise, to stimulate job creation and provide additional managed work space for new and micro businesses.
- Additional 'growing on' units to enable young businesses to develop and create new jobs.
- Flexible land use planning policies, efficient development services and proportionate charges to encourage more business investment in the Borough.
- Greater openness and

transparency by planning authorities regarding the proposed and actual use of funds when dealing with firms required to contribute under Section 106 Agreements.

- A more consistent approach by the Town Centre Partnership regarding Sunday trading in Stafford, plus improved marketing and promotional campaigns to encourage increased town centre footfall on Sundays.
- The Chamber remains opposed to the introduction of a Supplementary Business Rate.

Our Employment Campaign

Through regular dialogue with local and regional planning authorities, the Chamber will continue to influence economic development strategy and lobby for greater efficiency in local planning services.



Staffordshire Technology Park, in Stafford, which is encouraging the growth and development of new business start-ups.

Maintaining close links with Instaffs UK and the regional development agency, the Chamber will help to encourage new business investment.

Stafford Enterprise, the Chamber's enterprise arm, will

advise up to 1,000 potential entrepreneurs this year, helping to create around 100 new businesses.

The Chamber will work with Business Link to secure additional funding for enterprise.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THIS BUSINESS MANIFESTO CONTACT:

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