

STAFFORD CHAMBER OF COMMERCE Business Manifesto 2008-2016

By Stuart
Walton,
Stafford
President

Introduction

The publication of the first Stafford Chamber Business Manifesto in 2008 prompted a wave of support as businesses and many public sector bodies identified with the issues and priorities we raised and united behind our campaign.

What has been achieved? Early successes include the re-introduction of rail services at Stone and work to increase car parking capacity at Stafford station – but there is much more to be done.

The recession has changed the economic landscape; however, although the pace of regeneration may have slowed the priorities have not changed. The long-term success of the Borough requires housing growth, expansion of business parks and industrial estates, more office units, new shops and the development of town centre living. We call on our public sector regeneration partners to maintain the momentum and deliver.

To attract new investment and development, local planning authorities must be committed to updating development plans in a way that gives clarity about the development direction.

Similarly, more can be done to ensure that the Borough's businesses benefit from local public sector procurement opportunities. There needs to be a change of emphasis from large single contracts to a more flexible and imaginative approach that meets the needs of the local business community. There should be the presumption that procurement needs can, and should, be met locally. Bureaucratic constraints are no excuse – our public sector partners can boost local job creation and help to kick-start local economic recovery.

Building upon a long history of power generation, the Borough is ideally placed to grasp the new opportunities in green energy production and environmental technologies. Again, our public sector partners must support this development by clarifying policy at a local and regional level, stimulating demand, ensuring that our colleges and universities can supply the specific skills training needed by employers and, of course, demonstrating a genuine commitment to local procurement.

The Chamber will continue to campaign nationally and at an EU level on the key issues affecting the prosperity of our members including: enterprise, regulation, pensions, taxation, skills, transport, energy, environmental technologies and crime.

At a local level, our priorities remain:

- Improve the local transport infrastructure.
- Promote workforce skills.
- Support employment growth and local public procurement.
- Support environmental technologies.



► **New shops and the development of town centre living in Stafford is required for the long-term success of the Borough.**

TRANSPORT

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 increases costs.

We need:

- Some quick-win improvements - review signalling to improve traffic flows.
- Essential road improvements: Support new housing and employment growth with a new western access route. Detailed scheme proposals for the Stafford Eastern and Southern Distributor Roads to open up new development opportunities and relieve congestion in and around Stafford.
- Increased capacity on the M6 through Staffordshire – we need a clear timetable for delivery of hard shoulder running and the use of Active Traffic Management.
- Improvements to the image, frequency and reliability of local bus services to encourage more people to use public transport.

■ Improved bus services to link areas where people live and work – particularly in rural areas.

■ A practical and affordable rail service, with earlier off-peak trains to London.

■ 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 Secured By Design standards, with Pay On Exit facilities and remote payment options.

■ NO Workplace Parking Levy which would be paid by employers and would not change travel habits.

Our Transport Campaign

Stafford Chamber will work with partners at a local, regional and national level to lobby for improvements to the area's transport infrastructure and services.

We will maintain regular dialogue with the following organisations to highlight issues that concern our members:

- MPs & Regional Minister.
- Local highways authorities.
- The Highways Agency.
- Regional Development Agency and Government Office for the West Midlands.
- Train operating companies.
- Network Rail.
- Other transport bodies.

► **Congestion on local roads and gridlock on the M6 is damaging productivity and weakening competitiveness.**

The growth of small businesses is vital to Stafford's prosperity

ENTERPRISE AND EMPLOYMENT

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.

We need:

- A specific pledge from our public sector agencies to purchase from local suppliers and to demonstrate how they have improved access to procurement opportunities for SMEs in the Borough.
- Completion of the Local Development Framework to clarify local land use planning policy, a flexible 'can do' approach to new development opportunities, efficient development services and proportionate charges to encourage more business investment in the Borough.
- New funding to stimulate job creation and provide additional managed work space for new and micro businesses.
- Additional 'growing on' units to

► Work continues at a pace on the Tipping Street Development Project in the centre of Stafford.



enable young businesses to develop and create new jobs.

- Greater openness and transparency by planning authorities regarding the use of funds when dealing with firms required to contribute under Section 106 Agreements, including contributions to highways improvements under the SUATMS fund.
- A co-ordinated approach to encourage increased Sunday trading in Stafford and greater town centre footfall.
- NO 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.

Maintaining close links with local inward investment bodies 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. To support this, we will work with Business Link to secure additional funding for enterprise and innovation.

SKILLS

To remain competitive, businesses need a skilled, flexible and motivated workforce together with effective management. This requires investment from business, from government and from the individual.

We need:

- Intense promotion of apprenticeships
- Investment in skills development from Level 2 to leadership and management training.
- Promotion of flexible access to higher education through foundation degrees.
- Measures to encourage graduates and

talented workers to live and work in the Borough.

- Renewable technologies to be a major feature of courses and applied research in higher and further education.
- Young people to have good basic skills before entering employment, a positive attitude to the workplace and a spirit of enterprise and creativity.
- Discrete funding to prepare people of working age who are not in employment to play a vital role in the local workforce.

Our Skills Campaign

Through dialogue with businesses, funding agencies, and training providers, the Chamber will ensure that the needs of businesses are heard and understood.

We will continue to encourage greater investment in leadership and management training while, at the same time, continue our work with Young Enterprise and schools to promote manufacturing, engineering and enterprise in the workforce of the future.

ENVIRONMENT

Climate change poses risks and opportunities for businesses and action is needed now to ensure that they are well prepared.

We need:

- Clear Government policy and strategy so firms can plan for investment and develop commercially viable products and technologies.
- Clear, readily available support and guidance to help firms reduce their carbon footprint, eliminate waste and prevent pollution.
- Commitment and funding to support take up of renewable energies for business and domestic use.
- Low cost recycling for businesses and better access to recycling facilities.

Our Environment Campaign

The Chamber's 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, support and new research.

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.

► The Altecnic building, located on the ProLogis Park, Stafford – one of the most impressive distribution centres in the UK.



FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THIS BUSINESS MANIFESTO CONTACT:

Stafford Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Civic Offices, Riverside, Stafford. ST16 3AQ
Telephone: 01785 257057, email jenwidgery@nscci.co.uk or visit www.nscci.co.uk