



South Staffordshire Council

Place Narrative 2023

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Contents

Welcome to South Staffordshire	Page 3
Introduction	Page 4
Map of South Staffordshire	Page 5
Highlights from the 2021 census	Page 6
What has changed: our people	Page 7
What has changed: our place	Page 9
What does the future hold?: our people	Page 12
What does the future hold?: our place	Page 13

Front cover images: Top left clockwise: Baggeridge Country Park Play Area, Staffs and Worcester Canal, Shoal Hill Common, South Staffordshire leisure centres, Weston Park, i54 South Staffordshire.



Codsall Community Hub

A story of our place

Welcome to South Staffordshire



South Staffordshire is a place offering a high quality of life, appreciated by people who have chosen to live here. In South Staffordshire, the quality of place and wellbeing of our communities are prioritised. As such, our economic base has grown in a sensitive way to retain the special characteristics that are valued by local people and visitors alike. South Staffordshire is forward facing, yet unspoilt by progress.

This Place Narrative is an important step towards creating a new Council Plan for 2024 onwards. It sets out how, in recent years, the national, international, and local context has altered the position of the area, with regard to ongoing health, wellbeing and economic priorities. Partners in the public, private, and voluntary sectors in the district plan carefully and collaborate to achieve progress on these priorities.

This Narrative will be used for extensive engagement with partners and communities at all levels.

The collaborative way of working is particularly valuable to maintaining South Staffordshire's successful economic performance, despite a challenging context.

South Staffordshire will continue to make a significant contribution to regional economic growth through the major developments at i54, the Royal Ordnance site in Featherstone, and the West Midlands Interchange. The

Business Partnership provides locality and sector-based engagement with the business community, supporting South Staffordshire's role as a place providing employment opportunities - particularly for our young people - and where people can start and grow businesses. The coronavirus pandemic, ongoing challenges and collective priorities see partners in the public, private and voluntary sector collaborating to achieve progress. These arrangements provide a framework within which all partners can work together, ensuring that local areas' particular needs and issues are addressed.

There is a strong district-level strategic partnership of public and voluntary sector organisations to engage with. The Localities Plus model brings to life a three-tier working model of county, district and parish councils co-ordinating work across the five localities in South Staffordshire. Regular Parish Summits bring stakeholders together to respond to issues, including health and wellbeing and the cost of living. This approach will ensure that South Staffordshire will continue to be a place where our residents are proud to live and that people choose to move to and to work in.

Councillor Roger Lees
Leader of South Staffordshire Council
May 2023

This Place Narrative is set in the context of a range of opportunities and challenges at local, national and international level.

A range of new investments have been secured in the district, including the expansion of the i54 development and the West Midlands Interchange project. Securing the benefits of these schemes for local people is important, as is ensuring the quality of the developments in their locations.

Since we produced our last Place Narrative in 2020, much has changed. There have been a number of factors which, through their sheer magnitude, have impacted on the social and economic wellbeing of our communities.

These include:

- A global pandemic
- The war in Ukraine
- Refugee schemes
- Cost of living challenges

Locally, we can see and feel the effects of these events on our communities. We saw the impact the pandemic had on our more vulnerable residents, both in terms of isolation and also economically, as many residents were furloughed. This impact was also felt on businesses and our local high street shops. Brexit has added to the challenges faced by some businesses, in terms of accessing markets and recruiting workers from mainland Europe.

There has been a strong local response to support those affected by the cost of living crisis, through food schemes and wellbeing packages - including the establishment of 'warm spaces'. Some of these local initiatives are funded by South Staffordshire Council's 'Community is the Best Medicine' programme, set up to support those challenged by the cost of heating their homes. Advice is also available from partners such as Citizens Advice, while Beat the Cold has complemented the support packages administered locally.



South Staffordshire

South Staffordshire is a predominantly rural district bordering the western edge of the West Midlands conurbation, Shropshire, Worcestershire and neighbouring Staffordshire authorities. The map, pictured right, shows how the district is made up of five localities, which form the basis on which we engage with partners and communities. There are a total of 27 parishes and 20 wards. The ward boundaries changed following a review in 2021.

Locality 1

- Huntington and Hatherton
- Penkridge North and Acton Trussell
- Penkridge South and Gailey

Locality 2

- Brewood, Coven and Blymhill
- Lapley, Stretton and Wheaton Aston

Locality 3

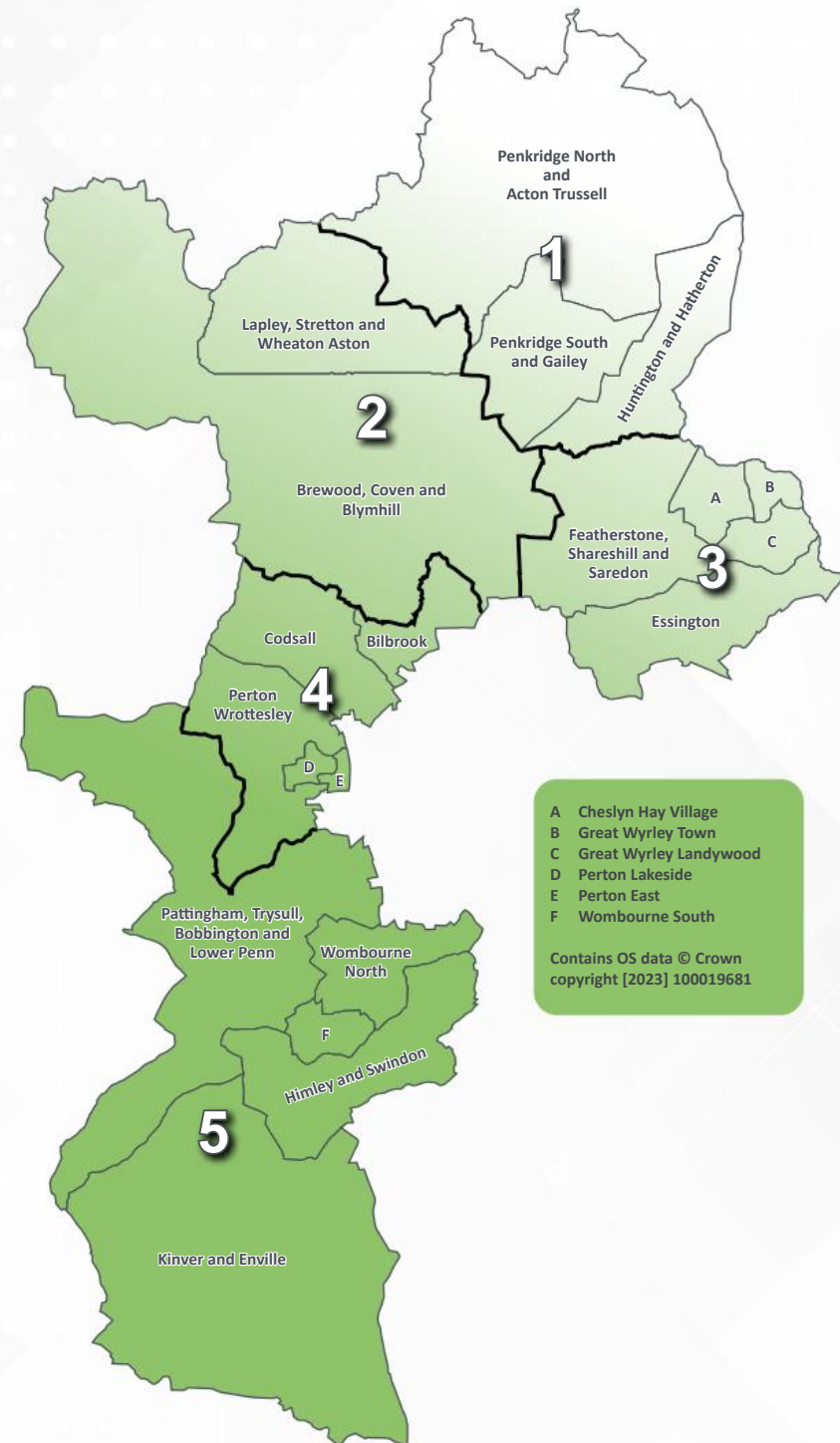
- Cheslyn Hay Village
- Essington
- Featherstone, Shareshill and Saredon
- Great Wyrley Landywood
- Great Wyrley Town

Locality 4

- Bilbrook
- Codsall
- Perton East
- Perton Lakeside
- Perton Wrottesley

Locality 5

- Himley and Swindon
- Kinver and Enville
- Pattingham, Trysull, Bobbington and Lower Penn
- Wombourne North
- Wombourne South



Highlights from the 2021 Census

Our population:

Between the last two censuses (held in 2011 and 2021), the population of South Staffordshire increased by **2.2%**, from just over 108,100 in 2011 to around 110,500 in 2021. The population here increased by a smaller percentage than the overall population of the West Midlands (6.2%), and by a smaller percentage than the overall population of England (up 6.6% since the 2011 Census).

In 2021, South Staffordshire was among the lowest (30%) for population density across English local authority areas at the last census. The district has around 1.9 people per football pitch-sized piece of land.

An ageing South Staffordshire:

Between the last two censuses, the average age of South Staffordshire residents increased by three years, from 45 to 48 years of age.

South Staffordshire has a higher average age than the West Midlands as a whole (40 years) and a higher average age than England (40 years).

The number of people aged 75 to 84 years rose by just over **2,900** (an increase of 40.7%), while the number of residents between 35 and 49 years fell by around **4,400** (19.1% decrease).

Health in South Staffordshire:

In 2021, **48.2%** of South Staffordshire residents described their health as 'very good', increasing from **46.9%** in 2011. The proportion of South Staffordshire residents describing their health as 'very bad' was 1.0% (similar to 2011).

This data reflects people's own opinions in describing their overall health on a five point scale, from very good to very bad. The 2021 Census was conducted during the coronavirus pandemic. This may have influenced how people perceived and rated their health, and therefore may have affected how people chose to respond.



What has changed: Our people

The Census of Population undertaken in 2021 provides a rich insight into the lives of people living in the district. While the overall population growth remains fairly stable - an increase of just 2.2% since 2011, compared to the national figure of 6.6%, the population does continue to age.

However, overall life expectancy of South Staffordshire residents is higher than the national average - 80.1 years for men and 84.1 years for women. The age to which people are expected to live in good health in South Staffordshire is 65.6 years for men and 66.3 years for women.

Rates of excess weight for adults are higher than the West Midlands (WM) region and England. For young children (aged four to five), the rates are equal to those for the WM but higher than England. Those aged 10 to 11 have rates lower than the regional and national figures. Physical activity rates for South Staffordshire are higher than regional levels, but lower than those nationally. The maternity care and healthy pregnancy rates are very good, with South Staffordshire having much lower infant mortality than the West Midlands and England.

This positive health picture benefits from a range of programmes designed to keep people active and support good health. Alongside formal leisure and sports activities -

including Gentle Exercise and Forward to Health - there are volunteer-led activities, such as Walking for Health and South Staffordshire's Cycling Scheme.

The district has been through very challenging times in the last three years, due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. Communities responded to the challenges presented due to the pandemic, with an increase in volunteering to provide practical support to those in need at local level. The pandemic highlighted the extent of isolation that exists, particularly among the frail and elderly. At a local level, an ongoing local response is essential to address this - and by working with organisations in the villages, as well as parishes and partners - including Age UK - we can offer support to those who need it.

The lessons from these experiences continue to inform the development and growth of local mutual support, which has continued with the need to address the current cost of living challenges. The increased cost of housing, energy, food, and transport all place pressures on those most vulnerable in our communities.

The South Staffordshire Community Lottery has raised £160,000 which has benefited almost 80 good causes, to enable them to invest in community services and support.



What has changed: Our people

What does the data say:

South Staffordshire is home to **110,500** residents. The population has a lower proportion of people aged under five, under 16, and aged 16 to 64, compared to England as a whole. However, the percentage of people aged 65 and over is higher than the national picture.



Overall life expectancy in South Staffordshire has seen a slight but insignificant reduction and is now **80 years** for men and **84 years** for women, both higher than the national average. The gap in life expectancy between the most deprived and least deprived areas in South Staffordshire has reduced slightly for men and increased slightly for women - and is now just over four years for both genders.

Around **25%** of children aged four to five in South Staffordshire have excess weight (overweight or obese), with rates now similar to average (they were previously higher than average). Around 34% of children aged 10 to 11 have excess weight.



The rate of hospital admissions caused by alcohol fell, but remains higher than the England average.



Adults having excess weight (either obese or overweight) has increased to over 68%, which is now higher than the national average (previously similar to England).



64% of South Staffordshire adults are physically active, similar to the England average. Only half of the district's adults are eating the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables per day, also similar to the England average.

The estimated dementia diagnosis rate (proportion recorded of expected cases) in South Staffordshire is similar the national average (previously lower than average). A small but insignificant increase.



The proportion of older people in South Staffordshire who are aged 60 and over living in income-deprived households is significantly better than the national average.



The proportion of children in South Staffordshire in relatively low-income households is lower than England, but has seen a steady increase before falling slightly in 2020/21.



What has changed: Our place

South Staffordshire is a place where people choose to live. In our 2021 Residents' Survey, 92% of residents said they would recommend South Staffordshire as a place to live. Boasting sprawling landscapes and lush greenery, South Staffordshire is set in the heart of the countryside, nestled between a range of bustling metropolitan locations. It is made up of 27 beautiful and inviting villages, each one bursting with character, attractions, and welcoming communities. These villages all have their own distinctive character and local people feel a strong affinity to them. Availability of open spaces close to people's homes is important and has a positive impact on health and wellbeing.

The location of South Staffordshire means that not only is it important to the wider Staffordshire county, but there are also close relationships with its other neighbours - the West Midlands and Shropshire - in terms of where people live and work.

There has been recent investment in promoting the district to visitors, who can enjoy the many attractions on offer locally. These include places of historical interest such as Weston Park - a house with many features in its extensive grounds, hosting a wide range of events throughout the year, including music festivals. Halfpenny Green Wine Estate has 30 acres of vines. Its site also features the Wild Zoo, offering a hands-on experience to educate guests about

animals. Baggeridge Country Park is an award-winning site of biological importance, with extensive walks, rich wildlife and many other attractions.

There is an ongoing commitment to mitigating climate change in the district. In 2022, young environmentalists from South Staffordshire showed their love for the planet when they took part in debates around how the district can help tackle the effects of climate change. Primary and secondary school children participated in the Youth Climate Committee, where they discussed what collective action we can all take to reduce our carbon footprint and preserve the environment for future generations. Ideas included creating more electric vehicle charging points across the district, planting more trees, and improving opportunities for cycling and walking. Each of the children also committed to a 'climate pledge' - one simple thing that they can do at home to help the local environment.

South Staffordshire is a safe place to live. Community safety is addressed at a locality level to understand the bespoke needs and challenges facing the different parts of the district.



Take a tour of stunning South Staffordshire



What has changed: Our place

The prosperity of the district has continued to strengthen with significant economic growth, creating the opportunity for almost 7,000 jobs at several manufacturing sites across South Staffordshire and over £2bn investment into the local economy.

The strong and long-term commitment to partnership working is demonstrated by the i54 development, an excellent example of how we have continued to strengthen the prosperity of the district and that of our neighbours, with partners including Wolverhampton City Council and Staffordshire County Council.

South Staffordshire is located at the edge of the West Midlands conurbation, making it an area which attracts growth and investment. Making sure the level and location of that growth occurs in the most sustainable places is critical - and this is the role of the Local Plan review. Retaining the character and identity of the place, while ensuring our villages retain diversity and prosperity is a challenge which requires effective engagement with communities and businesses.



JLR, i54 South Staffordshire



What has changed: Our place

What does the data say:

The proportion of children in South Staffordshire who reach a good level of development at the age of five (76.4%) fell recently, but remains better than the national average (71.8%).



The percentage of adults aged 16 to 64 with NVQ level 3 or above is 17.6% - higher than the national average (16.9%). However, a higher proportion of adults have no qualifications (19.3%) compared to the national average (18.2%).



Both unemployment and youth unemployment rates in South Staffordshire have seen recent reductions and are lower than the national average (as at June 2022).



GCSE attainment for South Staffordshire pupils has fallen recently and is currently worse than the England average.



Housing affordability is increasingly an issue in South Staffordshire. The average house price (£265,000) now stands at eight times the average gross salary (£33,075).



The gap in the employment rate between those with physical or mental long term health conditions (aged 16 to 64) and the overall employment rate has increased to 17% - similar to the national average (11%)

South Staffordshire has a lower than average proportion of children who are absent from school and has experienced recent reductions in absence levels.



Nearly **13%** of South Staffordshire households were living in fuel poverty in 2020. Similar to the previous year and better than the national average.



Overall rates of crime, antisocial behaviour, sexual offences and violent crime in South Staffordshire are all low in 2022, although violent crime saw a significant increase on the previous year.



What does the future hold? Our people

Engaging with our communities

Regular Parish Summits and virtual forums bring partners together to respond to issues, including health and wellbeing and the cost of living. This approach will ensure that South Staffordshire continues to be somewhere our residents are proud to live and a place where people choose to move to and to work in.

Connected

Digital technology is fundamentally changing the way we live, work, and learn - and the adoption of digital technology has become widespread in almost every aspect of modern life. With digital progress high among our priorities, we are using new skills and ways of working to shape the design and delivery of services. This results in faster response times and personalised interactions, while enhancing our communication and allowing residents to engage more effectively. We will still enable access to services through non-digital channels for those who do not have digital access.

Nowhere in South Staffordshire is unable to receive broadband - although decent connectivity is not available in some areas.

93.9% of South Staffordshire now has Superfast availability compared to 95.9% of the UK and 96.4% of the West Midlands. Average download speeds and availability of gigabit remain significantly below national and West Midlands levels.

Workforce

The development of our local workforce is important if we are to benefit from recent and future investment – and this is particularly important for our younger people. South Staffordshire's business support networks and links with schools have been particularly important in addressing this, with a specific focus on raising the aspirations of our young people and connecting local people with new and emerging opportunities.



Better health

We are developing a programme under Better Health Staffordshire which fits very well with our Locality model. Local partnerships are in place, which see partners and communities work collectively over the long term (10 to 15 years) to deliver on actions which tackle the causes of excess weight and promote an active lifestyle. The asset-based approach focusses on the potential of what already exists within an area and builds on that. Given the extent of locally based activities focussed on increased activity, South Staffordshire is in a good starting place to benefit from this approach which will help to increase our focus on addressing the challenges of maintaining healthy lifestyles.



How life has changed in South Staffordshire:
Census 2021



Census 2021 - Staffordshire Observatory

What does the future hold? Our place

Young children in South Staffordshire do well, with over three quarters of them having a good level of development by the time they reach school age – higher than the national average. At secondary school level, however, GCSE attainment for South Staffordshire pupils is worse than the England average.

Amongst adults, those with NVQ level 3 or above is higher than the national average, however a higher proportion of our adults have no qualifications compared to average. Unemployment and youth unemployment rates in South Staffordshire have seen recent reductions and are lower than the national average.

The proportion of older people in South Staffordshire who are aged 60 and over living in income-deprived households is significantly lower than the national average, as is the proportion of children in South Staffordshire in relatively low-income households.

Housing affordability is increasingly an issue in South Staffordshire. The average house price (£265,000) now stands at eight times the average gross salary (£33,075).

Partnership working

The Localities Plus model that operates in South Staffordshire provides a framework for all three tiers of local government - county, district and parish - to work together with others in the public sector such as health, the police and fire services, and partners in the voluntary and private sectors in response to the impact of these and other challenges on different parts of the district. Partners work closely to understand and respond to the implications of trends in health, the economy, community safety, and demography, using the Census and other data sources to inform our activities.

Partnership working takes a 'who is best placed to deliver' approach. Working relationships have strengthened between partners. The introduction of Locality Enabler roles at South Staffordshire Council enhances the connections between partners and encourages cross-service working within the council. The Enablers are staff from existing service teams, who remain in their substantive roles and so provide both a focus on the particular Locality they are allocated to, while also applying their specific professional expertise to the whole Locality approach.

Within the voluntary and community sector, Support Staffordshire has been commissioned to establish key community groups in each of the Localities to provide a portal for enhanced community consultation and engagement. These will also act as facilitators of local mutual support and signpost people to organisations that can respond to their needs.



What does the future hold? Our place

Future economy

South Staffordshire will continue to make a significant contribution to regional economic growth through the major developments at i54 South Staffordshire, the Royal Ordnance site in Featherstone and the West Midlands Interchange.

Plans for the developments are now progressing. The West Midlands Interchange commenced in 2023. It will be the largest rail-served logistics development in the UK, offering 8 million sq ft of premium logistics facilities and creating 8,500 jobs. This will build sustainable foundations for the logistics sector and replace road freight for rail, producing 70% less carbon dioxide. It is hoped that the first occupiers will arrive by the end of 2024.

An additional 100,000 sq m of development will be made available on completion of the i54 Western Extension; this will create a further 1,700 jobs.

There is also the opportunity to develop a green corridor extending from Wolverhampton across the border into South Staffordshire. The proposed route will start around J2 of the M54, encompassing our green growth triangle and includes a potential metro route, and a planned park and ride site.

Further to this, Logic54, at the former Royal Ordnance Factory site in Featherstone, will provide accommodation for a range of uses including industrial, storage, and distribution, accessed by a new motorway link road, creating 1,700 jobs.



i54 South Staffordshire

What does the future hold? Our place

UK Shared Prosperity Fund

South Staffordshire has been awarded £3.82 million from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and a further £0.49 million due to the rural nature of our district. The local partnership in the district has developed our Investment Plan based on a range of key priorities, including skills and business support. It is also based on our Locality 3 Action Plan, as this part of the district has higher levels of unemployment and benefit dependency, lower skills and educational attainment, poorer health, and higher crime levels. Digital connectivity is an underpinning enabling priority across all priorities. Developing the plan has just been an extension to our existing locality-based partnership approach, developed over many years.

The additional funding for rural areas integrated into the UKSPF provides capital funding for small businesses and community infrastructure, including converting farm buildings to business and rural tourism locations.

Invest in South Staffordshire 

The Business Partnership

The Business Partnership provides locality- and sector-based engagement with the business community, supporting South Staffordshire's role as a place where people can start and grow businesses. These arrangements provide a framework within which all partners can work together, ensuring that local areas' particular needs and issues are addressed.



As the coronavirus restrictions eased, the relationships that had been established to support businesses during the lockdowns were key to the success of initiatives to get the local economy moving again – not least in the local village high streets. The Business Partnership (BP) brings together businesses of all sizes and sectors, the council, and public sector partners, to share knowledge, best practice, and to network on important and varied topics facing all our business sectors. As part of our partnership, we have over 100 business partners signed up to the Partnership, and nine Strategic Support Partners from the business support networks and community sectors. Following the pandemic, support was given to high street recovery - for instance creating a Virtual High Street video to promote buy local.

Through the BP, the five Locality Partnership Hubs across the district focus on a particular sector (hospitality or manufacturing, for example), and are differing in their needs and relationships with us as the local authority. Early work has included drop-in sessions for businesses which have focused on different topics, for example de-carbonising and building resilience. The Hubs also provide a gateway 'open door' to business support services.

What does the future hold? Our place

The Local Plan



The future growth of the district needs to be carefully balanced to maintain the character and identity of our place. We do this through a Local Plan.

The Local Plan is critical for communities to remain vibrant and for local people to have the opportunity to live and work in the district, generating the need for homes and sites for development. Although new developments have taken place, proposed green belt loss has been kept to a minimum and only 7% of the district is built up. Managing this appropriate level and location of growth in the future is the role for the Local Plan. The Local Plan creates the opportunity to deliver infrastructure to support growth.

The current Local Plan is being prepared in consultation and will be subject to examination in public prior to adoption.



South Staffordshire Community Hub

Since the production of our last Place Narrative, the Codsall Community Hub project has been completed. Investment in the council's headquarters is transforming how council services are delivered. The council continued with the project during the pandemic; supporting economic growth at such a turbulent time in the wider economy.

The Hub is now a modern, energy-efficient working environment with an emphasis on social space, rather than the traditional 'nine till five' workstations. The building provides a local base for Staffordshire Police, Staffordshire County Council, a library, a private nursery, a GP surgery and many voluntary sector organisations and businesses, including a café. The removal of cellular offices creates an open environment where teams, councillors, and partners work together in new collaborative spaces, including pods, collaboration zones, and break-out areas.



South Staffordshire Council

Roman Bridge, Weston Park