

# Transforming North Staffordshire Executive Summary



Prepared for the North Staffordshire Regeneration  
Partnership

March 2008



## Executive summary

**About this report:** In February 2007 the North Staffordshire Regeneration Partnership commissioned The Work Foundation to undertake an independent review of the economic and social circumstances of North Staffordshire (the three local authorities of Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle-under-Lyme and Staffordshire Moorlands). There were three objectives for the study: first, to develop a distinctive and evidence-based vision for North Staffordshire; second, to ensure that key stakeholders were engaged in the process and agreed with this vision; and third, to raise the profile of the area.

This report sets out our findings and recommended vision. It builds on our conversations with key stakeholders, as well as on our review of available literature and data (using our *Ideopolis* framework). The report sets out why the area needs to act, what the challenges and opportunities are in the context of a changing economy, recommends a vision for the area to aspire to, and makes headline recommendations about priorities for action to address the difficulties North Staffordshire faces, as well as other potential areas for action over time.

It is important to note that this report does not, and cannot, provide 'the answer' to North Staffordshire's challenges, nor was it ever intended to be a detailed implementation plan. What the report does do is set out an independent review of where North Staffordshire is now, as well as outlining the beginnings of a road map for change.<sup>1</sup> What the North Staffordshire Regeneration Partnership recognise, however, is that for this report and 'road map' to lead to transformation relies on action, by them and by stakeholders across the area. The findings and analyses of this independent report are therefore being used to inform the Regeneration Partnership's detailed implementation plan, with clear priorities for the next three years and beyond, to help make transformation of North Staffordshire a reality.

What the evidence – ours and yours – shows is that North Staffordshire faces difficulties that cannot wait. Despite being well connected into the national economy in a central location in England, having two universities, and having competitive labour and land costs, North Staffordshire is not only below average on a substantial range of indicators but on some measures, such as population, is going against the national trend of rising prosperity and growth.

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<sup>1</sup> The detailed analysis, including a statistical review of where you are now, the results of our consultation with stakeholders and our detailed recommendations, is in the five supporting evidence papers.

There are four issues that make it increasingly important that North Staffordshire take action now (see Section One). First, as knowledge intensive industries (this is high to medium tech manufacturing, finance, business services, communications, health, education, cultural services, air and sea travel) increasingly become drivers of competitive advantage across the UK economy, North Staffordshire finds itself falling behind. It has lower than average proportions of these knowledge intensive industries, and of knowledge intensive workers and residents. This makes it more difficult to increase the productivity of the area, already well below the English average. With the decline of employment in the manufacture of ceramics (although knowledge intensive design expertise in ceramics remains), North Staffordshire needs to define a new 'purpose' for itself in the changing economy and to increase the proportion of higher skilled, higher value jobs in the area.

Second, at a time of growing prosperity that has brought economic success to many areas, including the post-industrial cities of Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield, North Staffordshire as a whole is defying the national trend of prosperity. The area still faces significant economic and social difficulties that persist despite some local successes and the considerable efforts of many local stakeholders to transform the area. The combination of the ongoing decline in employment in ceramics, the lack of growth in employment in other sectors – partly as a consequence of a lack of appropriately skills in the area – and too many regeneration projects foundering at the early stages of implementation means that the transformation of the physical environment, shifts in the economy and attitudinal changes that have happened in other cities have not happened in North Staffordshire. It all adds up to the area running the risk of falling so far behind that it will be very difficult to even catch up.

Third, whilst North Staffordshire is well connected within England, at present people and knowledge based firms are taking advantage of this to pass by or leave the area. With the nearby economies of Manchester and Birmingham growing rapidly, there is a need to ensure that North Staffordshire is no longer bypassed by investors or by skilled workers and families looking to relocate but instead benefits from and complements the successes of its near neighbours.

Fourth, local, regional and national policies are aligning and there is a temporary window of opportunity to make change happen. The creation of the North Staffordshire

Regeneration Partnership (NSRP) has made it possible for the area to develop a vision and action plan that will be implemented across North Staffordshire<sup>2</sup>. This opportunity is being further reinforced by a growing local desire for change across the public, private and third sector, the cross-party consensus that a shared vision is required and continued support from Advantage West Midlands, the West Midlands Regional Assembly and English Partnerships. National policy, most recently set out in the Local Government White Paper, Sub National Review and Comprehensive Spending Review, is also increasingly recognising the importance of working at a sub regional level to transform local economies, creating an important opportunity for North Staffordshire to change its future.

These four issues are combining to make it vital that North Staffordshire take action now to address the difficulties it faces. Based on an analysis of where North Staffordshire stands now using the *Ideopolis* framework developed by The Work Foundation, these difficulties are significant, particularly in Stoke-on-Trent (see Section Two). Twice the national average rate of worklessness, population decline, high levels of people without qualifications, lack of commercial accommodation and poor internal connectivity are key issues that North Staffordshire needs to address and our analysis shows that major intervention is required if North Staffordshire is to prevent long-term terminal decline.

Yet it is clear that there is a local, regional and national determination to address these difficulties. There are also a number of opportunities on which the area can capitalise more effectively. These include: the universities and emerging specialisms linked to them; good location and external connectivity; low land and labour costs; and changes in the provision of housing and commercial accommodation. It is within North Staffordshire's gift to change its future by building on these assets.

This report highlights two potential visions for North Staffordshire's future (see Section Three): one developed by the group of local stakeholders and one developed based on feedback from interviewees. We would recommend accepting a version of the second vision (set out below) as the one that has resonated most with local leaders. Whilst we recognise it is likely to require some amends before it is finally agreed, it responds to the local desire to have a distinctive 'North Staffordshire' vision, as well as building on and responding to the group of local stakeholders' desire to reflect the business competitiveness and quality of life within the area.

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<sup>2</sup> Although it is important to note that the relationships of the local authorities with the NSRP vary: for example, Staffordshire Moorlands was not part of the Regeneration Zone, whilst Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme were

**The best of both in North Staffordshire: prosperity and quality of life by design**

**By 2030 North Staffordshire will be offering the best of both to residents and visitors:**

- A place at the heart of the UK's creative ceramics businesses and ceramics tourist industry;
- A place for growing knowledge businesses and for ambitious knowledge workers;
- A place for enjoying the delights of the city, market towns and the countryside – from the Potteries shopping centre to the Peak District National Park;
- A place for working, studying at the universities and enjoying attractions like Alton Towers and Waterworld;
- A place ambitious for growth but concerned always with sustainability.

To achieve this vision, however, prioritisation is absolutely crucial. This is a key message emerging from North Staffordshire stakeholders; reinforced by our research, particularly case studies of other cities. There are many actions that can be undertaken to respond to the series of difficulties with which North Staffordshire is grappling and a series of detailed recommendations for consideration by North Staffordshire are set out in Evidence Paper D. There is a considerable danger, however, that by trying to do everything North Staffordshire does not complete the key activities required to transform its economy. With this in mind, we have set out the key actions that our and your analysis suggests should be priorities in the short and medium-term. These are:

**Short-term priorities – deliver in next twelve months**

1. Agree a shared vision for the whole of North Staffordshire and a focused delivery plan – with clear priorities – to achieve this vision and to ensure projects and policies are coordinated.
2. Create a network of 'North Staffordshire Ambassadors' to raise aspirations within North Staffordshire and to promote the area, with clear objectives for the network.

**Short and medium-term priorities – some tangible progress in next twelve months**

*These cannot be delivered in twelve months but tangible progress should be made*

3. Progress city centre developments informed by the City Centre Development Framework. Projects need to be well-coordinated, clearly linked to the overall vision and priorities and have clear accountabilities and detailed delivery plans agreed. There should be tangible signs of change within the year.
4. Invest in transport between the city centre, Stoke-on-Trent station, Staffordshire University, Newcastle-under-Lyme and Keele University. In the first twelve months the city centre bus station should be replaced as a tangible sign of progress.
5. Develop a long-term programme to address worklessness and deprivation (considering interventions in schools, with employers and to raise aspirations overall). It will take decades to change, but needs to be a priority. Within the first twelve months some tangible progress should be made, for example through a mentoring programme and focusing efforts on a small number of deprived wards.
6. Progress development of the Keele University Science Park and the University Quarter.
7. Finalise plans for development of Newcastle Town's retail and business accommodation with priority placed on growing its professional services and a distinctive retail offer.

### Medium-term priorities

*These are priorities that are still vital but marginally less urgent than those above (although some, such as those based in Staffordshire Moorlands, may start to happen in the next twelve months because of local impetus). In the next two to three years these are important issues on which to deliver:*

8. Grow the knowledge intensity of the area through capitalising upon the universities and FE colleges and improving support for knowledge-intensive enterprises.
9. Invest in a quality of life strategy across North Staffordshire in order to attract and retain higher income residents as well as to improve the quality of life of existing residents. This will need to pull together the North Staffordshire Tourism strategy, Renew's work on housing and the development of creative industries, as well as Leek and Cheadle masterplans.
10. Build on the Creative Quarter to use creative industries as a catalyst for regeneration and work towards a high profile event in five years.

All of these priorities must be underpinned by a commitment to **sustainable development** and managing the environmental impact of all projects. With such a

significant physical and social transformation of the area planned, North Staffordshire has a real opportunity to lead the way in this area. Each individual priority is discussed in more detail in Section Three.

To reinforce the importance of priorities, we have developed scenarios for the future if North Staffordshire does nothing, does everything, or focuses on key priorities (see Section Four). This illustrates that North Staffordshire can make a difference if it prioritises its investment and actions.

In the light of this analysis, our conclusions (see Section Five) are that North Staffordshire does have an opportunity to turn itself round if it acts in a strategic and concerted way to face its significant economic, social and environmental challenges. By agreeing a shared vision and clear priorities for action, developing a detailed delivery plan, and then working together on these key priorities across Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire Moorlands and Stoke-on-Trent, North Staffordshire could, over the next twenty years, start to transform its economy, environment and quality of life.

The Work Foundation relied upon many people to produce this final report. The authors (Alexandra Jones, Laura Williams, Naomi Clayton and Peter Carroll) would like to thank the North Staffordshire Regeneration Partnership and leaders for their support, engagement and challenge throughout the process of the work, as well as all the participants in the Forum group on 9 May and those who gave up many hours of their time to participate in the Action Planning Group. Participants came from many sectors – private, public and voluntary – and their commitment was integral to our work. Evidence Paper E contains most of their names: we hope the whole report reflects their insights. We would also like to thank Paul Hildreth for his comments and involvement throughout the work. As always, any errors contained in the work are the responsibility of The Work Foundation.

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