

2024-
2029

Biddulph Town Council Five Year Strategy



Biddulph Town Council



Five Year Strategy

WRITTEN BY:

Mrs Sarah Haydon, Chief Officer

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INTRODUCTION

Biddulph Town Council is aspirational. The needs of our community are firmly at the forefront of every action and project that the Town Council undertakes. We want to improve services, facilities and public spaces, making it easy for our community to access support and ensuring that Biddulph is a good place to live and work.

In recent years, the Town Council's approach to achieving our aspirations has become more strategic. We have put steps in place to be ready with the delivery of capital projects when funding becomes available, and we have made brave decisions about assets within the town. In support of this, the Town Council was awarded Gold as part of the Local Council Award Scheme; we received praise that stated, 'you lead your community and continuously seek opportunities to improve and develop even further'. The Town Council was also awarded a Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) Silver award, demonstrating our commitment to excellent health and safety practice. Both awards help to instil a level of confidence in the ability of Biddulph Town Council to deliver projects effectively.

This Five-Year Strategy builds on the vision that has been set out by the Town Council through comprehensive action plans, Regeneration and Business Plans, and medium-term financial forecasts.

At the end of 2023, the Neighbourhood Plan and Neighbourhood Development Order were approved by a referendum in the town. This further adds to the tapestry of documents that underpin our vision for the town.

The purpose of this Five-Year Strategy is to bring together our plans and aspirations to ensure that our decision-making is not ‘knee-jerk’ or unfocused. At the same time, the Town Council will need to be flexible in a changing landscape, where funding for projects is complex. The Town Council must continue to focus on growth, but only where this benefits our community, is appropriately funded and in line with the aspirations set out in this document.

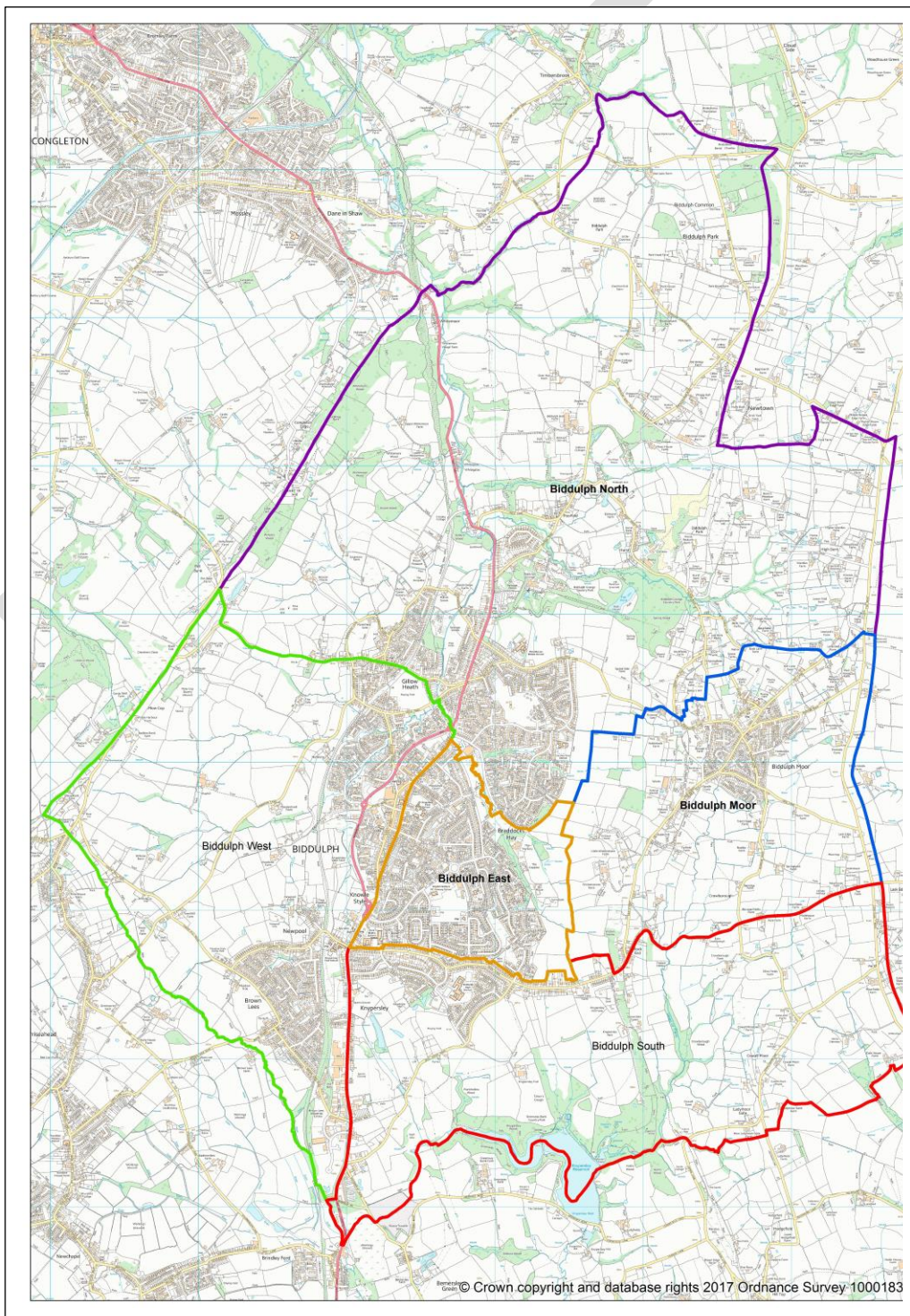


The Leat at Biddulph Old Hall, Courtesy of Barry Knapper.

AN INTRODUCTION TO BIDDULPH

Biddulph lies in the north-west corner of the Staffordshire Moorlands District and near to the southern boundary of Cheshire. Prior to the Local Government Act 1972 and the consequent changes in 1974, Biddulph was an independent industrial town serving the surrounding rural area.

Biddulph is divided into five wards, with 22 Town Councillors. Biddulph East is the most deprived area of the town, with 57.7% of households experiencing at least one level of deprivation (education, employment, health or housing), compared to 46.1% in Biddulph North



The major transport route both north and south is the A527. Congleton is reached first in the northerly direction. Roads can then be taken west to the M6 or north to Macclesfield and Manchester. In the southerly direction, the A527 links up with the A500 and then to the M6 south.

The nearest railway station is Congleton, although Kidsgrove and Stoke-on-Trent are easily accessible and access to Manchester and London is relatively quick. National Cycle Route 55 passes through the town on the track-bed of the old railway line.

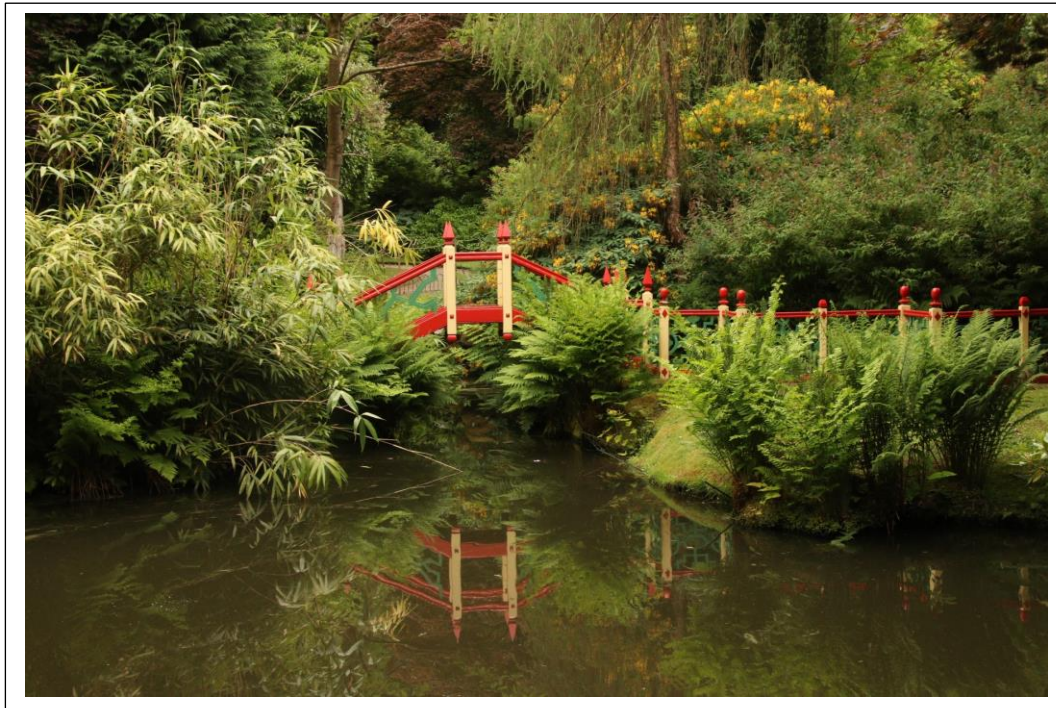
A Householder Survey completed as part of the Neighbourhood Plan development, provided clear evidence that the views and links to the countryside are what people most like about living in Biddulph (83% strongly agree, 14% agree). People living in Biddulph feel very connected to the landscape and value its intricate mosaic of habitats which are both clearly visible and easily accessible via the footpath network. The mix of woodlands, waterways, wildlife and geological features are all found to be important to local people, as is the Green Belt which currently protects them.

Biddulph is known as the 'Garden Town of Staffordshire' with many green spaces throughout the neighbourhood area. Some of these have significant community value and through the Neighbourhood Plan, the Town Council identified and protected fifty Local Green Spaces, which are of particular importance to the community.



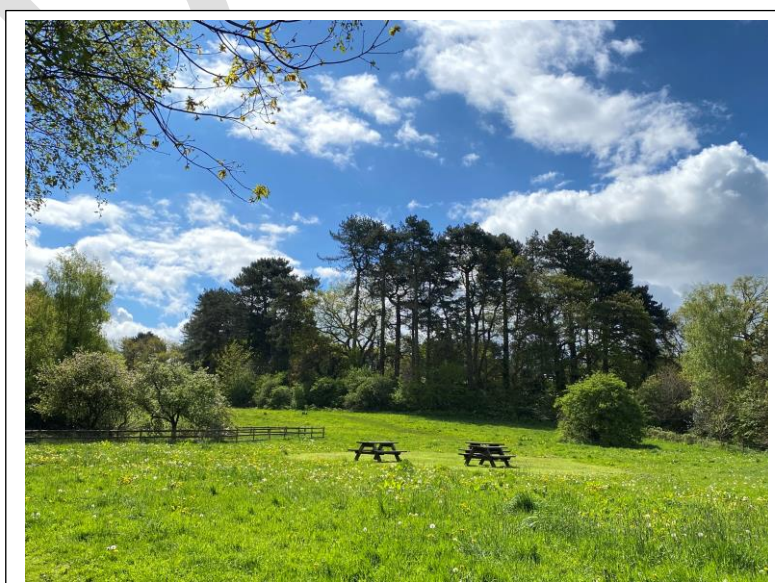
The Biddulph landscape, Courtesy of Judie Tingle.

Biddulph has a range of very popular tourist destinations, and is a good base to explore adjacent towns and activities. The National Trust run Biddulph Grange Gardens, which is a quirky Victorian garden, created by James Bateman for his collection of plants from around the world. Divided into a series of theme gardens, including a Chinese temple, Egyptian court and a Himalayan glen.



The Chinese Garden, Courtesy of Laurel Burndred.

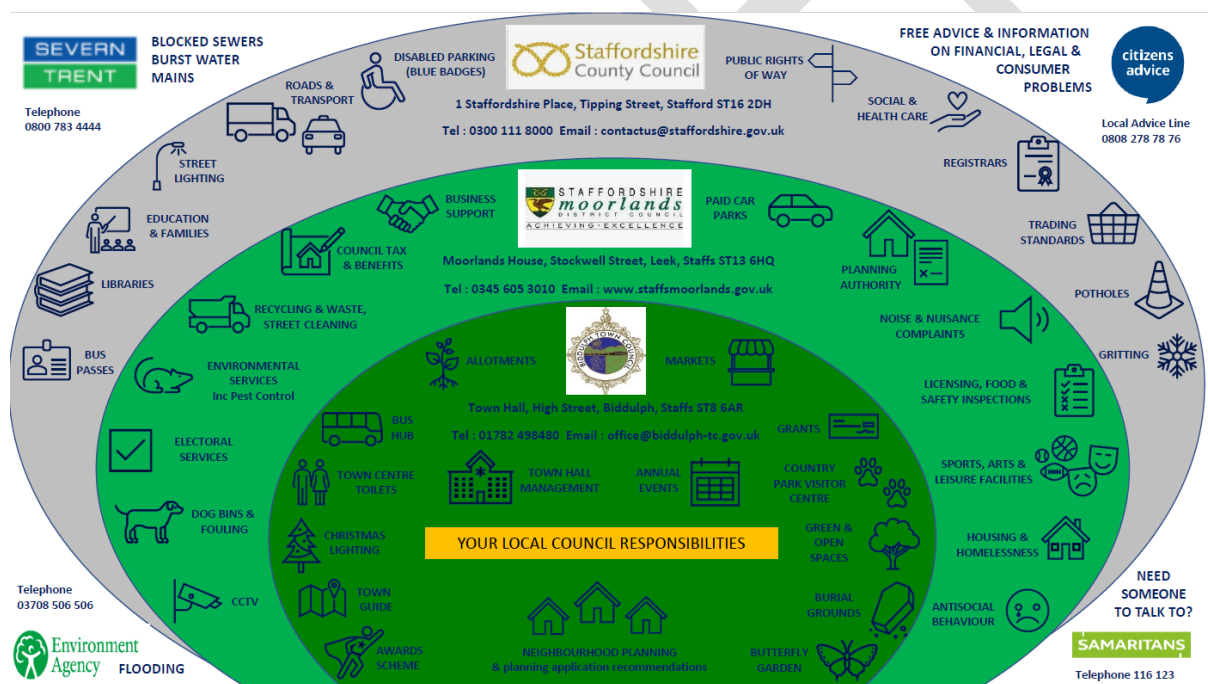
Adjacent to the formal Gardens is a Country Park, now managed by Staffordshire Wildlife Trust. The Town Council took over the Visitor Centre within the Park, which (following a refurbishment) is a well-used coffee shop.



There are almost 20,000 people living in Biddulph, across all wards. According to the 2021 census data, 26% of these are over 65 years old and 20% are under 18 years of age. This provides different challenges for services across the town.

There is one large Health Centre, occupied by two GPs practices and additional peripatetic services. There are a number of dentist practices, offering both NHS and private treatment. Biddulph has a maintained library service, which is much-loved by the community.

Residents of Biddulph must navigate three Councils to understand who can tackle their particular issue. The Town Council has good relationships with both Staffordshire Moorlands District Council and Staffordshire County Council. Increasingly, we also work with other town and parish councils, both within Staffordshire and outside the area. The respective responsibilities of Councils in Staffordshire look like this:



Through the introduction of Town Council managed customer service provision within Biddulph Town Hall, a community hub has been established. Our aspiration is that a resident or visitor to the town should be able to enter or telephone the Town Hall and receive an answer to their query, or appropriate signposting to the correct service. Biddulph Town Council has become one of the County Council's Community Help Points, joining a network of excellent community organisations with a local focus on service delivery.

Biddulph has one high school (ages 13 to 16) with a sixth form (ages 16 to 18) and two middle schools (ages 9 to 13). These are fed by several first schools.

There are a number of smaller play areas across the town, but the main site is the Halls Road recreation ground. This is an area of open grassland with a children's play area, multi use games area, football pitches, tennis courts, outdoor gym equipment and surfaced circular path, providing easy access around the site and onto the wider footpath network.

There are several established sports clubs within the town. There is a very active football scene with a wide number of youth teams. Biddulph boasts successful swimming and running clubs, and a long-established Cricket Club. In addition, outdoor bowling provision is good and the town has a well-used leisure centre, which is managed by Staffordshire Moorlands District Council via an external provider.



Knypersley Cricket Club, Courtesy of Tony Lally.

Biddulph is fortunate to have an active voluntary and community sector. Partners have a clear vision in relation to gaps in provision, and actively seek funding to fill these gaps. They work well together, providing complementary services and opportunities. The Town Council has a number of publications that celebrate and promote these groups, and networking events throughout the year

As an example, the Town Council established a Dementia Action Plan in 2017, and sought to enhance provision through partnership work. Currently, the town is perceived as a 'flagship' within Staffordshire with regard to the support

and services that are provided to people with life-limiting conditions. This is something to be very proud of.

There are a number of challenges with regard to retail and town centre activities. As with most High Streets, the changing nature of shopping patterns means less footfall. As part of the Neighbourhood Plan development, the Town Council has been working to re-imagine areas of the town centre. A town centre masterplan identified a range of challenges, and stated:

'Improving the public realm with high quality material, shop front upgrades and facilitating a dynamic street setting will help in fostering a sense of place for Biddulph Town Centre. This can further be enhanced by providing resting spaces and places of interaction in the form of public squares to host markets and community events. The space outside the Town Hall can be reconfigured to provide a public square. This space can potentially be a flexible venue for the monthly artisan market, fresh food Friday project that happens weekly and other community events.'

Town centre investment will be a key priority for the Town Council over the life of this Strategy.



Classic Vehicle show, September 2023.

WHAT DOES THE TOWN COUNCIL DO?

'I've had an idea' is a phrase often heard within the offices and Chamber at Biddulph Town Council! A phrase that's greeted with both groans and enthusiasm, but which demonstrates the energy with which the Town Council engages with projects, both established and emerging. There is a culture of positivity where collaboration is key to success.

In the past five years, the Town Council has continued to manage three burial sites, two allotment sites and a range of green spaces.



Park Lane allotment site, Courtesy of Wayne Rogers.

In August 2020, the Town Council agreed to take over the management of Biddulph Town Hall, Country Park Visitor Centre and Wharf Road public toilets/ bus hub. It is anticipated that further assets will be transferred to the management of Biddulph Town Council during 2024, which presents both exciting and challenging opportunities over the period of this Strategy. The transformation and improvement of these assets will require effective costing and planning going forward.

The Town Council has a comprehensive programme of events throughout the year. Many of these events are free to attend with free refreshments to ensure they are accessible for the wider community. As cost-of-living issues continue, there are energy saving days, which host a range of partners who can offer advice and support. We have a number of larger events during the year, where the roads within the town centre are closed, to provide a safe space for large numbers of people. These include the Festival Launch Day, Classic Vehicle Show and Christmas Lights Switch-on event. The Town Council has a dedicated

officer for events and partnerships, and a clear set of procedures and policies to support appropriate event management practices.

In 2024-25, the Town Council will have budgeted expenditure of £680,845.00, and a precept requirement of £66.14 per year for a Band D property. This is the highest expenditure and precept requirement within the Staffordshire Moorlands. Biddulph Town Council has a very different role to other towns and parishes within the Moorlands, and is more comparable with some of the Cheshire East town councils.

Biddulph Town Council actively seeks grants from a wide range of organisations. Small allocations could fund an LED lightbulb project or food for an energy saving event; larger grants may be allocated to capital projects that enhance and improve the public realm. Increasingly, grant funding seems to require a level of work to be completed before an application can be made. This Strategy will ensure that the Town Council continues to be forward-thinking so that we can be ready for these pots of funding when they are available.

As with all town and parish councils, Biddulph Town Council has a clear structure with regard to decision-making. Elected representatives must steer the direction of travel and discussion must take place to ensure robust and transparent policymaking. This strategy is supported by annual action plans, which provide the opportunity to assess the impact of activities and reflect on changes that might be required.

The Town Council has a number of working groups that provide the opportunity for greater analysis about the needs of the town. An Environment and Climate Change Working Group has a clear focus on enhancing green spaces and appropriate management of energy use relating to Town Council assets. The Health and Wellbeing Working Group seeks to understand barriers to services, and to expand provision and understanding for those that need support. The Transport Working Group oversees the commissioning of the 93-bus service, which is funded by the Town Council, and identifies and lobbies for improvements to services.

In 2022, the Town Council led a partnership that became known as 'Biddulph Works Together'. This began as a group of local organisations that were looking to coordinate efforts in relation to the cost-of-living crisis, and has become something much more important. These services now actively work to

provide warm spaces and free food (funded by the Town Council), but also make a significant contribution towards tackling loneliness and social isolation, making vital connections to ensure services are delivered as efficiently as possible.

CONSULTATION

Feedback from consultation to be inserted here. Period of consultation 23/4/2024- 17/05/2024.

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OUR VISION

Biddulph is the 'Garden Town of Staffordshire'. The Town Council's vision is:

Biddulph is loved for its beauty, with a distinctive identity and independent retail experience. Biddulph is a good place to live, attracting investment and tourism, providing services that support our residents. Biddulph is innovative and proactive with environment and climate change projects, working to enhance and protect our community spaces.

Underpinning this vision are four pillars:

1) Efficient and responsive services

We endeavour to provide excellent customer service, ensure repeat business, high levels of satisfaction and low numbers of complaints. We will ensure our existing services continue to improve and adapt to the changing needs of our community. We will support public and community transport schemes.

2) Growth and development of our community spaces

We will seek to grow the role of the Town Council by enhancing our community facilities whilst addressing climate change issues and protecting and improving leisure and recreational facilities.

3) Excellent Governance

We work to ensure effective planning and robust systems of financial control as a result of high levels of knowledge acquired through experience and training. Good leadership gives confidence in service delivery and decision-making.

4) Appropriate and meaningful community engagement and support

We will strengthen local democracy, encouraging inclusivity and seeking to engage with communities using a wide range of methods, providing feedback and the opportunity for comment and involvement in decision-making. Keeping health and well-being aspirations at the forefront of our planning.

A focus group identified the following priorities under each pillar; these will be expanded further within the action plan:

Efficient and responsive services

- Allotments- Development of an accessible plot at Park Lane; new fenced area at Park Lane; re-surface Springfield Road car park; identification and development of a new allotment site
- Buses- Enhancement of 93 service; expand use of bus hub; bus stop/shelter improvements; lobby for additional services.
- Re-surface Burial Ground footpaths
- Develop new support role as part of Biddulph Works Together
- Develop new Garden of Remembrance and additional options to commemorate deceased members of our community
- Improvements to Visitor Centre
- Repair/ replace fountains at Station Road
- Improve Butterfly Garden

Growth and development of our community spaces

- Development of Changing Places facility
- Identify potential Moorlands Partnership Board projects
- Develop Town Hall frontage
- Enhance CCTV provision
- More embryo and pop-up business opportunities
- Develop play area at Biddulph Grange Country Park
- Shared Prosperity projects
- Biddulph in Bloom community garden
- 'Bee Friendly' town
- New grass cutting responsibilities
- Tree planting projects/ green space improvements
- Amey public realm work
- Improve cycle routes
- Increase public art
- Staffordshire Wildlife Trust mapping
- Town Hall solar panels

- Buy/ improve community asset
- Management of Briarswood

Excellent Governance

- Develop Biodiversity Plan
- Local Council Award Scheme (2026)
- Excellent audit/ management arrangements in place
- Increase local listings
- Roll out of carbon literacy training
- Embed monitoring and the development of Neighbourhood Plan priorities within the Planning Committee, through the Neighbourhood Plan Implementation Working Group.

Appropriate and meaningful community engagement and support

- Create energy champion/ Plan
- New Town Guide and bespoke leaflets
- Health and Wellbeing projects
- Cost of Living Projects
- Tourism/ branding/ merchandise/ promotion