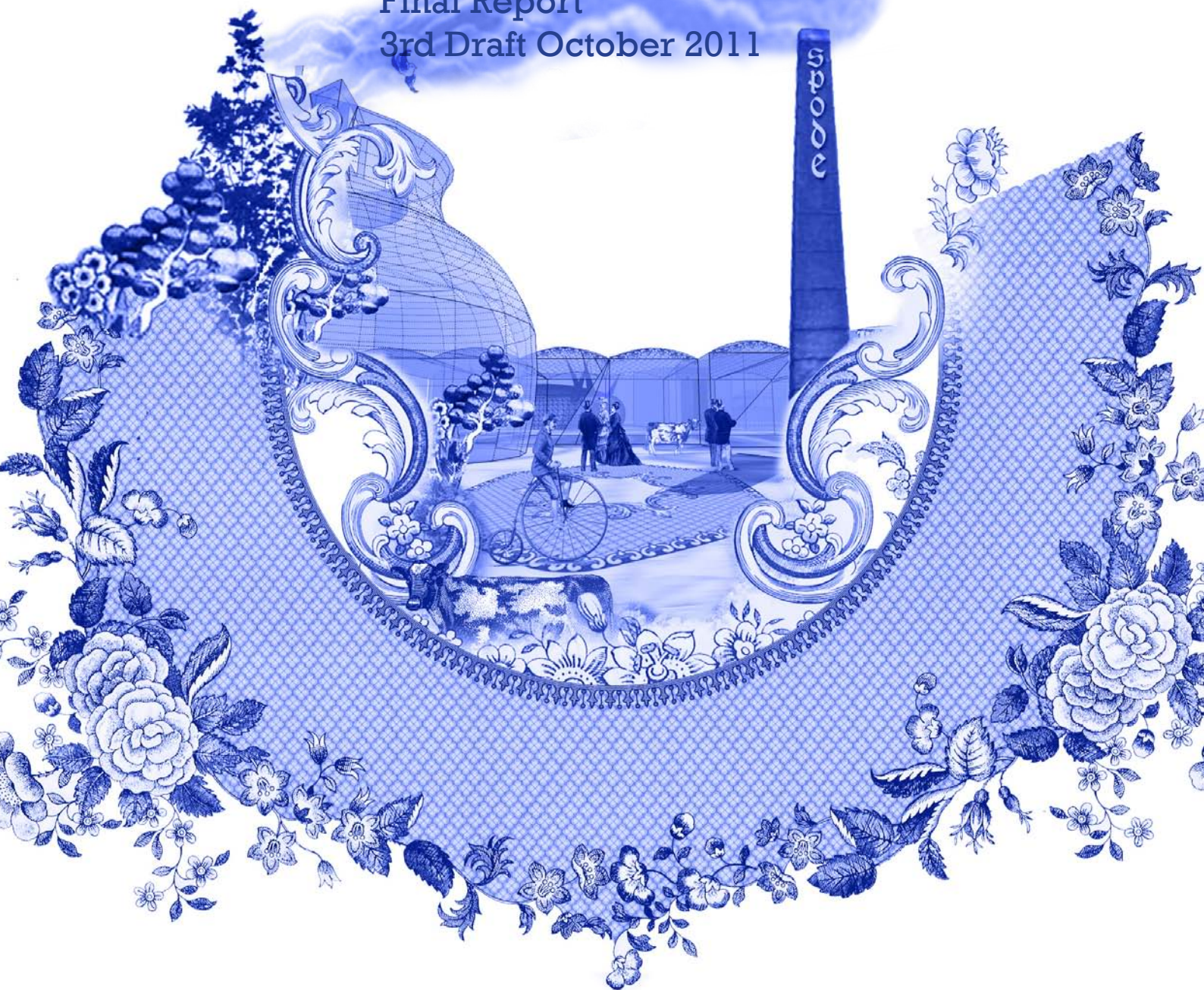


# Stoke Town Masterplan

Final Report  
3rd Draft October 2011







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# Summary

This report sets out a vision for Stoke Town as it might be in 20 years time. However, more important it sets out a step by step strategy to achieve this vision starting in a time of weak markets and public sector spending cuts. The overall aim is to grow the regeneration of the area, using its assets and allowing Stoke Town to seize future opportunities.

This report has been prepared for Stoke-on-Trent City Council by a team led by URBED and sets out a twenty-year strategy for the regeneration of the town. It has been prepared after extensive consultation with local people and stakeholders including a workshop in September 2010, consultation on options and a further consultation on the preferred option in March 2011. In total these consultations have involved around 350 people and elicited 145 written responses.

## **The role of stoke (town) in Stoke**

The first issue addressed by the report is the role of Stoke Town. It was once at the heart of the ceramics industry with a cluster of pottery works including two of the most important, Minton and Former Spode Works. Portmeirion is the last remaining ceramics works and the town of Stoke that thrived on the large local workforces and the money invested by its ceramics 'barrons' needs to find a new role.

This change is all very recent. The former Former Spode Works works closed only two years ago and unlike other industrial towns, that have had many years to recover from the loss of their core industries, in Stoke the wound is very fresh. Further more this change has been inflicted in the heart of a recession and at a time of public sector austerity. While levels of deprivation and unemployment in Stoke Town are not comparably the worst in the conurbation the town centre is currently struggling with almost 30% of the shop units vacant (2010).

Stoke Town therefore needs a new role, one that resolves the dilemma that while it contains many of the facilities that you would expect to find in a city centre (the mainline railway station, town hall, minster, market and indeed University and College), it is on the bottom rung of the hierarchy of shopping centres in the conurbation. Previously it has been suggested that Stoke

Town should become a 21st century market town. Our assessment however concludes the town is too close to Hanley and suggest instead that it should become the recognised station/university quarter of the city centre. As we point out, this would be perfectly normal in a continental city and is an appropriate response to the unique polycentric structure of Stoke on Trent.

## **Grow-your-own regeneration**

The masterplan has grown out of a thorough analysis of the town in the knowledge that there is likely to little public money available to deliver any large scale restructuring. The masterplan described in this report is therefore ambitious. It is also important to realise that the completed masterplan is the culmination of a journey. Each of the steps of this journey is possible and builds on the step that proceeded it. If for any reason we can't get to the end of the journey, or have to pause for breath at any time, the plan is designed so that it still works even if some or even all of the big projects don't happen or are delayed.

Stoke Town is not an isolated place. There are millions of people in and around the town every day: students in the University and College, people working in the Civic Centre, shoppers at the supermarket, patients and workers at the hospital and travellers on the A500 and railway. If we were able to encourage just a small proportion of these people to come into Stoke Town, to spend a few hours and a little money, the fortunes of the town could be transformed.

To do this we need to make it easier to access the town, particularly over the barrier of the A500. However, what we really need is an attraction that draws people in. The former Former Spode Works Works site is an opportunity to create just this and this strategy envisages the site developing as a creative community (such as Camden Lock in London).





Re-animated former Spode Works streets

However, this will take time so that this strategy seeks to kick start the process by looking at the potential for a new retail store to the rear of the site. This is potentially important for two reasons, firstly it will attract people into the heart of the site. Secondly it will generate a capital receipt to help fund elements of the strategy such as the bridge over the A500 and environmental improvements in the heart of the town. The overall strategy is therefore to concentrate activity in the heart of town and on the Former Spode Works site allowing sites to the south to be developed for housing and the land between the railway and the A500 to be developed for employment uses.

### **Rediscovery, repair and renewal**

This strategy has developed into a masterplan for the whole of Stoke Town. The masterplan shows how the Town will look when the strategy is completed. However, at the end of the report we show how this will develop on a phase basis. This includes the following elements:

**The Former Spode Works works:** The masterplan proposes to retain the historic buildings on the former Spode Works site, (approx 20,000m<sup>2</sup> in total). Much of this will initially be mothballed and then brought in use over time as demand grows. Uses include a museum and visitor attraction around China Bank Court including the possible reconstruction of the bottle kiln. A specialist ceramics retailing centre, bringing together factory shops from the wider area and a creative community of artists studios, gallery space, speciality shops and over-time creative office space are all included within the proposals. The environment will be a maze of alleyways and courts, somewhere to be discovered and explored.

**The Retail Store:** The plan also proposes a medium sized retail store on the open land to the rear of the site. The store would be built over its car park, which would be accessed from Elenora Street. The double height entrance would face onto a new square linking it with a 'high street' through the former Spode Works works.

**Stoke Links:** The aim is to use the retail store to help

fund a new footbridge over the A500 in order to open up the Stoke Links site. This would be developed over time, initially moving the surface car park northwards to allow the development of a new station square, retail units, a hotel and offices. There is also scope to reuse the base of Swift House for restaurant and bar uses facing the canal. Then as the scheme becomes established there is the opportunity to create a major arena/convention centre over a decked car park.

**Town Centre:** This strategy will help to consolidate activity into the heart of the town creating a strong retail spine between the existing supermarket and the proposed new store. The plan proposes that existing shops on London Road be relocated to vacant units in this area around Campbell Place and Church Street to concentrate activity in this area and link it to proposed environmental works to Campbell Place.

**A working town:** The strategy seeks to protect and encourage employment in the town. We estimate that the creative reuse of the former Spode Works buildings could over time create up to 400 jobs and a further 300 would be provided by the retail store. This estimate more than replacing the 400 lost when Spode Works closed its doors in 2008. We also suggest that the Side-way site is a major opportunity to provide high-quality employment space along the canal allowing existing employers to relocate if they wish and attracting new ones.

**Living neighbourhoods:** The masterplan covers more than the former Spode Works site and the town centre. The boundary includes the residential areas to the south along London Road and Campbell Road where the proposal is to use the opportunities created by the former Victoria Ground and the land between London Road and Yeaman Street to build new homes and diversify the housing offer of the town. This will help to attract new people to the area.

**A Sustainable Place:** The overall sustainability strategy within the masterplan is based on a proposal for a combined heat and power plant to be developed as part of the retail store that can be extended to serve the former Spode Works site and other facilities in and around the town centre. This would be linked to energy efficiency measures and renewable energy, primarily photovoltaic panels. The aim is not to make Stoke Town an exemplar but simply to keep up with good practice being implemented in many areas across the UK at present.

**Taming the car:** The highways strategy is designed

to address the problem that more than 80% of traffic in Stoke Town (excluding the A500) is through traffic (Arup, 2010). Much of this is currently directed onto a one-way gyratory system through the centre of the town where traffic speeds create a hostile environment. The strategy proposes to make many of these streets two way, slowing traffic and allowing on street parking which won't so much reduce the amount of traffic but will reduce its impact.

**The public realm:** As part of the Masterplan a public realm strategy developed with Jan Gehl Architects from Denmark, has created a range of public spaces from the alleyways and courts of the former Spode Works site to a major new public square outside the Kings Hall. The strategy also includes improvements to Campbell Place and a hierarchy of streets and public routes.

This is a strategy designed for its time. It is designed to be developed gradually over a number of years without major injections of public money. The work has indeed already started with preparations for the British Ceramics Biennial that will take place in the former Spode Works during autumn 2011 alongside some initial arts and retail uses. This gradual development of the site will build to a point where the retail store opens allowing the regeneration of the town to be taken to the next level.

The people attracted by the store will generate activity. This activity will in turn accelerate the development of the proposals within the existing former Spode Works buildings and part of the capital receipt generated by the store could potentially be invested into the new bridge. This is a 'game changer' because it will transform the actual, but more important the perceived, accessibility of Stoke Town. The site will be five minutes from the station and functionally part of the city centre. This will open up the development of the Stoke Links site and provide further impetus for former Spode Works and Stoke Town Centre.

The final masterplan will take many years to achieve and we accept that it is ambitious. However, the market will change over the next two decades and the places that succeed will be those that have done the work and are prepared to take advantage of the opportunities when they present themselves. We believe this strategy allows Stoke Town to do just this.





Stoke Town Masterplan sites





Former Spode Works and Stoke Town Centre from the air

## The masterplanning team and documents:



**URBED (Urbanism, Environment and Design)** - is an award winning consultancy that specialises in urban design and sustainability in an urban context. The practice works across the UK from its base in Manchester and works for public and private sector clients. URBED is leading the masterplanning team as well as providing design and consultation input. ([www.urbed.coop](http://www.urbed.coop))

### GEHL ARCHITECTS

**Gehl Architects** - is a world renowned practice offering expertise in the fields of urban design, city planning and architecture. Their role is to provide input to the public realm strategy and wider strategic thinking. ([www.gehlarchitects.com](http://www.gehlarchitects.com))



**DTZ** - are property and market specialists. Their role in the project is to provide advice and knowledge on the market, financial appraisals and delivery routes for the final masterplan. ([www.dtz.com](http://www.dtz.com))



**Arup** - is an independent firm of designers, planners, engineers, consultants and technical specialists offering a broad range of professional services. Their role on this project is to provide technical input and expertise to the highways, public realm and transport strategy. ([www.arup.com](http://www.arup.com))

### Baseline and Options Reports

- Residential and Market Review
- Transport Baseline
- Urban Design Assessment
- Consultation Report
- Options Appraisal and Report
- Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report
- Proposed Options Summary

### Exhibition Material

- Options Exhibition
- Proposed Option Exhibition

### Final Report Documents

- Sustainability Appraisal
- Sustainability Strategy
- Housing strategy
- Delivery Plan
- Transport plan

All documents available on:

**[www.urbed.coop/stoketownmasterplan](http://www.urbed.coop/stoketownmasterplan)**



# Introduction

This masterplan for Stoke Town has been developed over an intensive six-month period. Over that time more than 400 people have contributed ideas and comments.

In September 2010 a team led by URBED were appointed to prepare a masterplan for Stoke Town centre. The brief set out 10 aims for the study, at the core of which was the need to find a sustainable future for Stoke Town Centre taking advantage of the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity of the former Spode Works site as a catalyst for change.

The appointment followed an international design competition held over the Summer of 2010. URBED's submission focussed on understanding how Stoke Town can heal its wounds and develop a distinctive economic role. The submission also focussed on, how it can attract people, investment and jobs, without stepping on the toes of the other six towns in the conurbation and particularly the City Centre and how it can do all of this at a time of deep public spending cuts. The team developed the idea of '*growing your own urbanism*'. This concept focussed not so much on grand plans that risk never happening, but on the process by which the town can develop in a series of more manageable steps. The result in ten or twenty years may be just as dramatic, but the process of change will allow for flexibility, sustainability and for the full involvement of local people and businesses. This approach was central to the competition and remains at the heart of this strategy.

Following URBED's appointment in September 2010 work started in earnest. The first steps included a series of studies to understand the area, its economy, housing market and transport. In October 2010 a workshop was held in the Kings Hall, attended by just over 80 stakeholders including elected members, traders, community representatives, agencies and council officers. This fed into the development of a series of options, which were subject to a six-week consultation period starting at the beginning of December 2010. This consultation included two sessions on URBED's bus and an exhibition at Stoke Library.

The responses to the consultation were combined with an options appraisal that considered viability, deliverability, sustainability and regeneration impact. On the basis of this work a proposed option was produced that was then subject of a second six-week consultation exercise up to 22st March. This also included an exhibition in the Library as well as a series of meetings and presentations. The responses to this exercise has fed into this final masterplan report.

The process has been rapid reflecting the urgent need for action in Stoke Town. We have been able to move quickly because the central ideas in the masterplan have been widely supported. There is broad support for the ideas of developing the former Spode Works site as a visitor attraction and use by the arts community, for rationalising the town centre retailing and one way system, for seeking high-quality housing and for spanning the A500 with a new bridge so opening up the Links site around the station. The main questions asked of all of these ideas have been how soon can they happen and how do we ensure that they are achieved?

Due to the current economic climate it has become clear that financial pressures will make it difficult for the Council to allow the plan to develop as gradually as we had first planned. The lack of public funding also creates a real danger that a gradual process could stall. We have therefore explored the possibility of kick-starting the development by promoting a retail store scheme on the rear section of the former Spode Works site. This is not without difficulties, but could deliver a capital receipt sufficient to assist in the wider scheme. Furthermore if done correctly, it could provide an attraction on site delivering more people into the town centre and providing a spur to regeneration. This has been the main issue addressed through the consultation process.

This final report summarises all of this work and the masterplan that has resulted. This is backed up by a series of more detailed technical reports as set out in the box opposite. Together we hope that they represent an opportunity to transform Stoke Town.



