

Cheshire East Local Development Framework

Annual Monitoring Report 2009/10

December 2010

Chapter 1 Executive Summary

1.1 This is the second Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) produced by Cheshire East Council to comply with the requirements of Section 35 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

Local Development Scheme

1.2 The following progress has been made with the preparation of the Local Development Framework:

- The Evidence Base to support the LDF, particularly the Core Strategy, has been put together over the last year.
- The Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report for the Core Strategy was undertaken between 27th April and 1st June 2009.
- The first stage of consultation on the Core Strategy Issues and Options Paper (Regulation 25 Consultation) was undertaken between November/December, for a 6 week period.
- Three Supplementary Planning Documents have been adopted: Alsager Town Centre, Local List, and Smallwood Village Design Statement.

Communities

1.3 The numbers of houses built remains low, with only 634 net dwellings being completed in 2009/10, whilst the affordability of housing remains a significant issue within Cheshire East, with house prices remaining high. On the positive side there has been an increase in the numbers of affordable dwellings built and a significant number of the dwellings built have been smaller sized 1 and 2 bedroom properties.

1.4 The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment identified 5,147 deliverable dwellings that were expected to come forward within the 1-5 year period, this equates to 4.48 years supply. Therefore there are currently insufficient 'deliverable' sites to meet the five year supply requirement. The Council intend to identify broad locations for future housing growth which will provide an additional 1,350 dwellings to the 5 year supply and consequently increase the 5 year supply total is increased to 6,097 dwellings. This equates to 5.3 years supply.

1.5 The population of Cheshire East is forecast to continue to grow, with an increasing number of people in the 65 or older age category, a likely result of the high life expectancy and good health in the area and as well as the general age profile of the Borough.

Economy

1.6 The effects of the economic recession continued throughout most of 2009, however, there appeared to be signs of recovery during 2010 evidenced at the national level by increases in GDP and stabilising unemployment rates. Cheshire East has felt the impact of the recession, with employment floorspace completions falling to almost half the rate in the 2009/10 period compared with the previous monitoring period. Despite this, the area

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has proven itself to be resilient with unemployment rates remaining below the regional level, and GVA projections anticipating higher annual growth in Cheshire East than the expected regional rates.

1.7 It is difficult to analyse indicator results at the present time due to a lack of time-series data. Nonetheless, certain trends appear to be emerging and will require further monitoring in order to assess their implications. Supply figures were down on the previous year by around 12 ha; half of this is accounted for by completed developments, whilst the remainder is due to permissions having expired. Over 80% of the supply is for mixed use development, and four large sites account for more than half of the supply (two of these are located in Crewe). It will be important to ensure that the Council maintains a supply of sites available for employment development and addresses any deficits in employment land provision through losses of existing uses.

Town Centres

1.8 The main conclusions that can be drawn from how the Borough's retail offering has performed during 2009/10 are that there has generally been a decrease in the number of vacant shops and retail uses within the town centres; most notably shops (A1) and financial & professional (A2) uses, although there are variations within the Borough. Notwithstanding this the majority of retail and leisure development has taken place within the town centres, which is a positive outcome. There are also currently 2 major regeneration schemes in the pipeline for Crewe and Macclesfield and a smaller scheme for Congleton.

Tourism and Culture

1.9 Cheshire East boasts many cultural assets, which appear to be performing well as reflected by steadily increasing visitor numbers to the area's top attractions. In addition to built attractions the area hosts a number of festivals which are well attended and help to generate income and increase the profile of Cheshire East. The authority is proactive in developing its visitor economy, and has developed a Visitor Economy Strategy for the area. This is an important component of the Council's economic priorities as it is an important contributor to the economy, contributing to local quality of life, and has a positive impact on decisions over business location and individual choices over where to live and work. The LDF will need to reflect these trends and aspirations within its policy framework.

Minerals and Waste

1.10 A key trend for minerals is the reported reduction in production of primary land won aggregates. The drop in demand for materials from the construction sector has been the principle reason for this. Aggregate landbanks remain above the national indicators although the recent revision of regional aggregate apportionments which require less primary land-won aggregates will need to be considered in the formulation of future policy.

1.11 The key trend for waste is the continued decline in overall municipal solid waste (MSW) arisings and the move away from landfilling in favour of recycling/composting. An implication of this trend has been the extension of the consented lifespans of existing landfill facilities as capacity is being reached slower than anticipated. New permitted

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facilities are utilising methods of waste management that move away from disposal and instead recover energy and recycle. This shows consistency with existing planning policy and waste strategy.

1.12 Consistent data capture on commercial and industrial waste (CIW) and construction, demolition and excavation waste (CDEW) streams has proved problematic. However, updated figures on CIW show an overall reduction in arisings and a significant increase in recycling whilst evidence also points towards a reduction in overall CDEW arisings.

Environment

1.13 Heritage assets present within Cheshire East are being pro-actively managed through the provision of guidance to landowners; the development of guidance notes on heritage features; the creation of a Local List of Important Buildings identifying locally important structures; the development of Conservation Area Appraisals for 31 of the 76 conservation areas in Cheshire East and the implementation of planning policy relating to heritage assets.

1.14 This proactive management has ensured that no nationally designated heritage features have been lost during the monitoring period and a significant reduction in the number of assets deemed to be at risk from 51 to 38 structures has occurred between the last two monitoring periods.

1.15 The natural environment within Cheshire East is being managed through the provision of guidance to landowners and the implementation of planning policy in Local Plans.

1.16 This management has resulted in an improvement to the condition of a number of locally important habitats; although a revision of the boundaries of Folly Cottage Meadow and Wood and Brereton Plantation has reduced the overall extent of locally important habitats. Planning policies have also ensured that none of these sites have been negatively impacted by development during the 2009/10 monitoring period.

1.17 Management has also positively reduced the area of land with SSSI status in favourable, declining condition by 149ha and subsequently increased the area of land with SSSI status in unfavourable, recovering by 82ha. However, there has been a decrease of 24ha of land designated with SSSI status deemed to be in favourable condition.

1.18 Planning policies have ensured that no SSSIs have been negatively impacted by development during the 2009/10 monitoring period.

1.19 Based on these results it can be concluded that the management strategies and policies seeking to ensure the protection and maintenance of the natural environment within Cheshire East are operating successfully.

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Climate Change

1.20 Cheshire East is committed to the management of climate change: cause and effect and the achievement of sustainable development. This is to be achieved through ensuring the efficiency of Council activities and positively influencing development across the Borough.

1.21 Air quality within Cheshire East is being positively influenced by management activities. This is indicated by the improvement to the majority of the Air Quality Management Areas declared in Cheshire East (due to their poor air quality). However, there may be a need to ensure that air quality outside these areas is similarly maintained and improved.

1.22 Water quality has also improved. As evident in the increase in the proportion of rivers achieving a good status for both chemical and biological quality between 2004 and 2006. A key factor contributing to this is the fact that during the most recent monitoring period, no applications were granted contrary to the advice of the Environment Agency on water quality or flood risk grounds.

1.23 The standard of development completed during the 2009/10 monitoring period was of good quality, with the average energy efficiency, SAP rating, of new homes in Cheshire East exceeding the national average for England (which was 78.5 in 2008). However, there is a need to continue to improvement of the efficiency of new development in order to meet national targets relating to carbon dioxide emissions and energy usage. Equally, the results of the Building for Life Assessment, which appraises the overall quality of a housing scheme show that there is significant room for improvement.

Policy Appraisal

1.24 The main policies which seem to be performing well are those in relation to Green Belt, National policy PPG2, this is due to the fact that a high proportion of the land within the former Macclesfield borough is within the Green Belt. Also the general design policies also appear to be performing well, these were the most commonly referred to policies in dismissed appeals e.g. BE.2 (Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council Replacement Local Plan 2011) and GR2 General Design Requirements (Congleton Borough Council Local Plan First Review). The design policies will be applicable to the majority of applications for new development and as a result referred to in a lot of decisions.

1.25 The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 required Local Authorities to identify which policies they would like to save prior to their replacement with additional LDF documents. Guidance advised that only those policies which did not replicate existing national policy should be saved. As part of this process many policies from the former Boroughs Local Plans were saved. Subsequently an issue has emerged in relation to the loss of a particular policy from the former Macclesfield Borough Local Plan which related to replacement dwellings in the Green Belt. As a result there have been several appeals in relation to this and most recently a Judicial Review. Consideration is currently being given to what action is required by the Council to address this situation.

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1.26 The Government revoked the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) in July 2010. This was subsequently challenged by Cala Homes with the outcome that the revocation has been quashed. The effect is that RSS remains part of the development plan until the revocation has been through the necessary statutory procedures. The implications of the revocation are listed in Chapter 4 (para 4.18), however the Council must consider which policies of RSS need to be retained should the Government decide not to put in place transitional arrangements.



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