

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Economy and Growth Committee**
held on Tuesday, 11th March, 2025 in The Capesthorne Room - Town Hall,
Macclesfield SK10 1EA

PRESENT

Councillor M Gorman (Chair)

Councillors S Adams, L Braithwaite, L Buchanan, C Bulman, A Burton,
R Chadwick, S Gardiner, A Heler, G Marshall, C O'Leary, P Redstone and
R Vernon

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Phil Cresswell, Executive Director Place
Peter Skates, Director of Growth and Enterprise
Charles Jarvis, Head of Economic Development
Carol Hyde, Head of Rural and Cultural Economy
Emma Williams, Carbon Manager
Julie Gregory, Acting Head of Legal
Steve Reading, Finance Officer
Rachel Graves, Democratic Services Officer

47 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors D Brown, J Clowes, P Coan,
B Drake and F Wilson. Councillors S Adams, L Braithwaite, C Bulman,
R Chadwick, and S Gardiner attended as substitutes.

48 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In relation to Item 11 and 13 – Handforth Garden Village Delivery Strategy,
Councillor G Marshall declared he was a member of the Strategic Planning
Board, which may consider future planning applications relating to the
Handforth Garden Village and stated that he would leave the meeting
during considerations of Items 11 and 13.

In relation to Item 6 – Rural Action Plan, Councillor C O'Leary declared a
non-pecuniary interest as he had just submitted a grant application around
rural housing insecurity.

In relation to Item 5 – Notice of Motion: Protecting Family Farms and
Preserving Rural Communities across Cheshire, Councillor A Heler
declared in the interest of openness that her family were farmers.

In relation to Item 11 and 13 – Handforth Garden Village Delivery Strategy,
Councillor S Gardiner declared he was a member of the Strategic Planning
Board and was present and voted in favour of the planning application

relating to the Handforth Garden Village and therefore would leave the meeting during considerations of Items 11 and 13.

In relation to Item 11 and 13 – Handforth Garden Village Delivery Strategy, Councillor M Gorman declared he was a member of the Strategic Planning Board and stated that he would take no part in planning matters relating to Handforth Garden Village.

In relation to Item 8 – Macclesfield Car Parking Feasibility Study, Councillor L Braitwaite stated that before she was a substitute on the committee she had intended to speak on this item as local ward member. She stated she would read out her statement and then leave the meeting during consideration of the item.

49 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 January 2025 be confirmed as a correct record.

50 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION

Mr Rob Grant spoke on the importance of local agriculture, emphasising its low carbon footprint as imported food had a much higher environmental cost and higher carbon footprint, and that local food production contributed to the local economy. He criticised the inheritance tax policies and stated that they disproportionately burdened family farms, potentially leading to food shortages and environmental neglect.

Mr Richard Yarwood expressed concerns about inheritance tax changes and highlighting their negative impact on elderly farmers who had dedicated their lives to agriculture. He stated that the tax could force farmers to sell land, leading to increased reliance on lower-quality food imports and asked the Committee to support the Notice of Motion opposing the inheritance tax changes.

Ms Sue Helliwell stated that the Council needed to support Cheshire East farmers as they played a crucial role in food production. She opposed the inheritance tax changes and urged the Committee to support local farmers by writing a letter to oppose the Government's changes to inheritance tax affecting family farms and advocate for the exemption of family farms to preserve the UK's food security, rural communities, and environmental initiatives.

Ms Sue Mason spoke on urban planning and the impact of decision-making on the community. Referring to the Macclesfield Car Parking Feasibility Study she stated that it acknowledged the need to ensure adequate parking was retained to support residents, visitors and businesses and the vitality of the town centre and asked that officers

conducted thorough impact assessments on traffic, schools, and hospitals before approving new developments.

51 NOTICE OF MOTION: PROTECTING FAMILY FARMS AND PRESERVING RURAL COMMUNITIES ACROSS CHESHIRE EAST

The Committee considered the report, prepared in response to a Notice of Motion: Protecting Family Farms and Preserving Rural Communities across Cheshire East farms, which had been referred to the Committee by Council at its meeting on 11 December 2024

Councillor A Heler addressed the committee as the seconder of the Motion.

The Committee debated the Notice of Motion. Points raised during the debate included:

- the changes having a negative impact on small farmers and family run farms rather than large landowners.
- it could lead to increase reliance on imported food which could be of lower quality.
- the economic damage the tax could have on rural communities as farms supported local businesses and employment.
- the increased financial pressure could worsen the mental health and high suicide rate amongst farmers.
- large corporations could find legal ways to avoid the tax and small farmers would bear the burden.
- farming was not a high-profit industry, and many farmers reinvested earning into their land.
- there was criticism of the Government's justification for the tax changes and that the statistics used were misleading.
- the inheritance tax reforms were necessary to prevent wealthy individuals from using farmland as a tax shelter.
- there should be tax relief for farmers who engage in sustainable environmentally friendly practice rather than applying a blanket exemption.

It was noted that further engagement with farmers and stakeholders would take place during the Rural Action Plan update, and that a rural workstream was being set up within the new devolution framework, and funding would be sought for rural initiatives.

RESOLVED: That the Committee

- 1 note the Notice of Motion.
- 2 note that engagement will be undertaken as part of the refresh of the Rural Action Plan throughout the year, and therefore to enable opportunities of support to be identified and included in the revised Rural Action Plan 2026-2030.

52 RURAL ACTION PLAN 2022 – 2026 UPDATE

The Committee received an update on the Rural Action Plan 2022-2026.

The Rural Action Plan was part of the Cheshire Plan 2024-25, with the aim of supporting thriving rural communities. The Plan focused on economic growth but also covered digital connectivity, transport, housing, environment, farming, and climate change. The previous plan covered 2018-2022 and was replaced by the current plan for 2022-2026, and discussions were beginning for the next phase for 2026-2030.

The Committee, during the debate, raised the following issues: -

- Rural connectivity issues as some rural areas lacked mobile and broadband access and there had been cases where storm-related service disruption had left residents completely disconnected.
- the lack of availability of affordable rural housing, which meant the often tenant farmers struggled to retire because they had to leave their farms but could not afford housing in their rural communities. It was felt that developers mostly focused on urban areas, with rural villages only getting expensive homes built. It was felt that local planning policies should encourage affordable housing through collaboration with parish councils.
- Rural poverty was often hidden because traditional poverty measures did not account for higher rural costs.
- The higher cost of living in a rural area included the lack of public transport meaning residents had to drive longer distances, with the nearest supermarket often far away, increasing food access challenges.

It was noted that a Member Advisory Group would be set up to shape the 2026-2030 Rural Action Plan, and it was asked that those with real rural experience such as farmers, rural works and local representatives be included. It was asked if the trade unions, especially those representing rural and agricultural workers be included.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the update report.

53 SERVICE BUDGETS 2025/26

The Committee considered the report which set out the proposed allocation of approved budgets for the Economy and Growth Committee, following approval of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy at full Council on 26 February 2025.

The details of the budget allocations were set out in Annex A to the report. Financial reporting would occur regularly to ensure budget adherence and prevent overspending. The financial reporting timetable for 2025/26 set was out in Annex B to the report.

During discussion it was asked if it would be possible to have a line-by-line document of the budget items the Committee were responsible for, with a traffic-light system (RAG status) to highlight overspending risks early. It was also raised about having a register of assets and investments. It was stated that the investment strategy was included in the MTFS and that the assets management report on general disposals would go to the Finance Sub Committee. The Finance Sub Committee was responsible for property transactions including buying, selling and appropriation of land and property (including compulsory purchase where required) whilst the Economy and Growth Committee was responsible for strategy and policy.

It was also suggested that all future development projects should undergo a comprehensive risk analysis before approval and details be included in the reports before the Committee.

RESOLVED: That the Committee

- 1 note the decision of the Finance Sub Committee to allocate the approved revenue and capital budgets, related budget changes items and earmarked reserves to the Economy and Growth Committee, as set out in Annex A to the report.
- 2 note the financial reporting timetable for 2025/26, as set out in Annex B to the report, as approved at the Finance Sub Committee on 10 March 2025.

54 **MACCLESFIELD CAR PARKING FEASIBILITY STUDY**

The Committee considered the report on the recent findings of a feasibility study conducted to explore the potential to declare surplus land contained within Duke Street and Churchill Way car parks and for release such land for redevelopment for housing.

Councillor L Braithwaite addressed the Committee in relation to the report and stated that the parking feasibility study provided in this report was not robust. It did not cover potential displacement onto residential streets and the impacts on traffic movement, and it was focused on a pre-determined outcome of surplus capacity on Churchill Way and Duke Street, without considering other town centre car parks.

Having previously declared an interest; Councillor Braithwaite left the meeting whilst the Committee considered the report.

The Committee asked about housing allocation and if any development would count towards the housing targets and in response it was stated that it would only count once any planning permission had been granted. Reference was made to the loss of car park revenue and that no clear assessment had been provided on how this would affect revenue for the Council. In response it was stated that this report was just the start of the

process, and that detailed work would be undertaken to take forward any proposals. Mitigation measures would also be looked at, including the introduction of residents parking permits.

A friendly amendment in relation to recommendation 1 was proposed and accepted by the Committee, to include the additional wording “subject to obtaining suitable planning permission”.

RESOLVED: That the Committee

- 1 agree the proposal to bring forward land forming part of Churchill Way and Duke Street car parks as housing sites subject to obtaining suitable planning permission and being declared operationally surplus.
- 2 delegate authority to the Executive Director Place to explore and select the most appropriate form of housing redevelopment to be located on the surplus land forming part of Churchill Way and Duke Street car parks.

55 CARBON NEUTRAL UPDATE AND MERSEY FOREST PARTNERSHIP

The Committee considered the report on the progress against the Council’s internal targets for carbon neutrality and on the Council’s partnership with the Mersey Forest.

It was reported that the Council had achieved a 15.3% reduction in its omissions and had offset almost 52% of its emissions through insetting projects within the Borough. Solar panels had been installed on car parks, and a solar farm was operational, and the Council had started electrifying its fleet, with 22 electric vans and 11 electric sweepers.

The Council had been a partner in the Mersey Forest since 2020 and had been awarded a Trees for Climate grant of £570,719.50 for woodland creation on the Batherton Estate which would enable a 33ha tree planting scheme.

The Committee asked whether the Council could afford electric vehicles as they were more expensive and if the electric vans could complete a full day’s work without the need for recharging. In response it was stated that electric vehicles were generally more expensive initially but over the lifetime of the vehicle it usually worked out to be cheaper to run. In relation to productivity for electric vehicles part of the business case for each vehicle was looking at the number of miles they could do in a day and also providing driver training as how they were driven could have an effect on the battery life of the vehicle.

Concern was raised about using productive farmland for tree planting. It was stated that no tenant farm would be affected.

It was asked if there were any plans to work with town and parish councils to plant trees. In response it was stated that the Council did want to work with them to identify land that could be used for tree planting but there were challenges around funding and if the land was next to the highway.

RESOLVED: That the Committee

- 1 note the progress made towards the Council's carbon neutral target and the Wider Borough Carbon Action Plan 2025-30.
- 2 accept the Trees for Climate grant of £570,719.50 for woodland creation on the Batherton Estate.
- 3 delegate authority to the Director of Growth and Enterprise, in consultation with the Governance, Compliance and Monitoring Officer, and the S151 Officer, to take all necessary steps to enter into legal agreements with The Mersey Forest Partnership.

56 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the Work Programme.

It was noted that the next meeting in June 2025 would receive reports on the Final Outturn Report 2024/25, End of Year Performance for the Growth and Enterprise Department, the outcomes of the consultation on the Home Repairs and Adaptions for Vulnerable People Policy, the outcome of the consultation on the Interim Housing Strategy 2025-28 and on the South Macclesfield Development Area.

It was requested if the Committee could receive information on the financial performance for the first two months of 2025/26 rather than waiting for the first quarter report at the September meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme be noted.

57 HANDFORTH GARDEN VILLAGE DELIVERY STRATEGY

Having previously declared an interest Councillors S Gardiner and G Marshall left the meeting before consideration of this item and did not return.

The Committee considered the report which provided an update on the progress towards delivering Handforth Garden Village and outlined options for delivery and proposed progressing with the option of exploring a joint venture with MADE Partnership.

Consideration had been given to potential delivery options and the option to enter into a joint venture with MADE Partnership was being considered, with a proposed 18-to-24-month exclusivity period for due diligence and partnership evaluation.

During consideration of the report concerns were raised about the risks involved in a large development and in response it was stated that the project had an extensive risk register. Reference was made to the adoption of the roads, and it was stated that discussions were being held with the Highways Authority at present on this matter.

RESOLVED: That the Committee

- 1 approve the Council entering into an exclusivity agreement with MADE Partnership to explore the principle of forming a joint venture partnership that would lead the development of Handforth Garden Village.
- 2 delegate to the Executive Director Place authority to:
 - i. negotiate and enter into the exclusivity agreement in the consultation with the Governance, Compliance and Monitoring Officer.
 - ii. renegotiate terms, conditions, and milestones of the Housing Infrastructure Funding (HIF) agreements with Homes England as necessary and take all actions required to enter into any updated or new agreements.
- 3 note that a further report will be brought back to the Economy and Growth Committee for a decision as to whether the Council should proceed to enter into a joint venture with MADE Partnership.

58 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED:

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item pursuant to Section 100(A)4 of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended on the grounds that it involves the likely discussion of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 2, 3, 5 and 7a of the Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 and the public interest would not be served in publishing the information.

59 HANDFORTH GARDEN VILLAGE DELIVERY STRATEGY

The Committee considered the information in the confidential appendix.

The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and concluded at 4.51 pm

Councillor M Gorman (Chair)