

OPEN

Environment and Communities Committee

13 November 2025

Local Plan Update

Report of: Phil Cresswell, Executive Director - Place

Report Reference No: EC/06/25-26

Ward(s) Affected: All

For Decision

Purpose of Report

- 1 This report updates members on national planning reform and the Local Plan programme; seeks approval to undertake a further call for sites and associated engagement and seeks approval of delegated authority for future decisions on the Local Plan.

Executive Summary

- 2 This report seeks two decisions, provides an update on national planning reform and progress on the new Local Plan for Cheshire East.
- 3 Local Plans are an essential place-making tool that co-ordinate development, infrastructure and services. The Local Plan is a crucial tool to help co-ordinate, fund and plan for the delivery of infrastructure across the borough and supports delivery of a range of priorities set out in the Cheshire East Plan, and the Local Transport Plan.
- 4 National planning reform is addressing multiple components of the UK planning system, including the development of a new Local Plan process. This requires legislation and guidance to be produced by government. There have been delays in progressing this, however updates are expected within this year.
- 5 In the meantime, the Council has been readying itself for formal commencement of the plan making process through programme planning, establishing governance arrangements, undertaking initial evidence preparation and resource planning.

- 6 To support readiness, decisions are requested to undertake a further call for sites and to delegate some Local Plan decision making to the Director of Planning and Environment. It should be noted that until new regulations are published, all local plan activity is undertaken with the understanding that elements may need repeating in part, or in full, to meet requirements that may be set out in new local plan regulations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Environment and Communities Committee is recommended to:

1. Agree to publicise and undertake a further call for sites.
2. Agree to delegate the following decisions associated with the production of the Council's New Local Plan to the Head of Planning, in consultation with the Chair of the Environment and Communities Committee. The delegation is proposed to be limited to the following:
 - a. Decisions to engage and consult with stakeholders on activities which support the production of the New Local Plan (workshops and focus groups for example)
 - b. Decisions to publish documents and material which support the production of the New Local Plan (including evidence and draft plans that set out options), and seek feedback on their content

The following are proposed to be exempt from the delegation:

- i. Consultation on a final draft New Local Plan
- ii. Submission of the New Local Plan to government
- iii. Submission of the post-examination New Local Plan to Council for consideration to approve

Background

National Planning Reform

- 7 The governments' planning reform agenda has seen the introduction of significant change with more systemic changes on their way. The key features of the new planning system are summarised at Appendix 4 with significant implications for Cheshire East:
- 8 Housing requirement has raised from 977¹ to 2,603 homes per year (including 5% buffer), causing a five-year land supply shortfall and activating the 'tilted balance' in planning decisions. This means that

¹ 977 is the figure derived from the 'standard method' in place prior to the December 2024. The annual housing requirement for the borough as set out in the local plan was significantly more ambitious than this and stood at 1,800 per annum, in place since 2017.

unless material harm is identified, proposals that support the delivery of new homes should be supported.

- 9 The introduction of 'Grey Belt' also has important implications for the borough. Grey Belt is land that does not strongly contribute to purposes a), b) or d) of the Green Belt to:
 - (a) check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
 - (b) prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
 - (c) preserve the setting and special character of historic towns;
- 10 As part of the evidence base, a review of the Green Belt has been commissioned that will assess the purpose and performance of the Green Belt and identify Grey Belt locations.
- 11 A further significant implication for the Council is the announcement of a potential site for a New Town at Adlington, identified by the New Towns Commission. The process to identify this site has been carried out wholly by government and third parties. The Council will engage with the process as appropriate.
- 12 Legislation to prepare plans under the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (2023) has been delayed, preventing the Council from commencing its new plan. It should be noted that [government has advised](#) that authorities preparing 'old style' plans must restart, from the beginning should they decide to switch to the new system.

Progress on the Cheshire East Local Plan

- 13 Despite regulatory uncertainty, a new Local Plan timetable, aligned to the March 2025 [Local Development Scheme](#), has been drafted and initial evidence gathering is underway. It is important to note that whilst the LDS sets out a programme that estimates adoption in late 2028, a review of the programme will be undertaken once the details of the new plan making system are published (expected by the end of the year) and the implications of it are further understood. An update to the timetable will follow from this review.
- 14 The [2024 'issues' consultation](#) identified key priorities (e.g., health, climate change, natural environment) to guide further plan development and ongoing monitoring continues, with the 203/4 [Authority Monitoring Report](#) and [Housing Monitoring Update](#) supplying critical baseline data.
- 15 The Minerals and Waste Plan will now be incorporated into the Local Plan and early work on a draft [Minerals and Waste Plan](#) (2022) provides

an important basis from which to further develop this element of the Plan.

Developing the evidence base for the plan

- 16 The new Local Plan will shape our places for years ahead and an accurate evidence base is essential to secure best outcomes. Work has focused on evidence components least likely to be superseded by forthcoming legislation; an evidence review (Appendix 5) highlights numerous areas to update.
- 17 When submitted, Local Plans must contain up to date evidence (often not more than two years old). Therefore, a prudent commissioning strategy is being managed through close project oversight.
- 18 Informal collaboration is in progress with Cheshire East's new Combined Authority partners, to explore implications and opportunities arising from the future regional Spatial Development Strategy, including potential cost savings from sharing of evidence.

Project Management and Risk

- 19 The Council's Project Management Office is supporting the plan programme and helping identify resource needs as legislation evolves.
- 20 Governance structures include an internal senior officer Local Plan Board (Director level) and a Members Reference Group; a risk register identifies key uncertainties—such as the impact of a forthcoming Spatial Development Strategy—while financial implications will be managed via the MTFS. A detailed review of the programme has led to a cost estimate of £2.574 million over a four-year period.

Consultation and Engagement

- 21 The existing Statement of Community Involvement ([SCI, January 2022](#)) continues to guide public engagement and will be replaced by engagement arrangements in a Project Initiation Document (PID) once new legislation is in place. The 'Issues' consultation complied with the SCI and will remain the engagement standard until regulations change.
- 22 The new system will require plans be prepared within 30 months and emphasizes digital engagement, especially mapping tools. Accordingly, the Council has upgraded its digital engagement platform with new software and will use this for the proposed further call for sites.
- 23 A communications strategy is being prepared which prioritizes digital outreach, with potential to supplement with targeted topic-specific discussions where valuable. An important aspect of the approach will be early and regular communication with Cheshire East members, and

ensuring clear information is provided to the public, to explain the process and how they can participate.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 24 The 'call for sites' is undertaken as part of the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment' (HELAA) and will also inform the production of the new Local Plan for minerals and waste site submissions. It considers all available land that could be brought forward for development, including land owned by public sector bodies. Therefore, there is a need for the Council's own land assets to be included in the assessment, alongside land that may be owned by town and parish Councils.
- 25 The 2024 call for sites returned some 365 sites for housing and economic uses, each of which has been digitised, mapped and recorded. The sites are listed and are available to view on a digital platform included at Appendix 1. Given the introduction of significant changes to the policy environment since this work was originally carried out, a further call for sites is required to ensure the plan making process is fair to all interested parties.
- 26 Currently the constitution requires all matters related to Local Plan policy development to be decided by E&CC. To respond effectively to the pending timescales for plan making, delegated decision-making is being requested to clarify that officers can publish parts of the evidence base, and engage with stakeholders as and when necessary, without the need to bring such operationally based decisions to committee. This approach will be underpinned by member engagement on such issues and liaison with the Member Reference Group. Decisions to publish final draft plans, and to submit proposed Plans to government will continue to rest with E&CC; whether to adopt the plan (post examination) will remain a decision for full Council.

Other Options Considered

- 27 The Council could wait for the full legal and policy framework for the reformed Local Plan making system to be put in place before it takes any substantive step towards progressing the new Local Plan. This option would delay completion.

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Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing	Delay to the Local Plan programme	Extended period where over which the Council cannot effectively control

		development and fully leverage its benefits.
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Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal/Governance

- 29 This proposal is carried out under Regulation 18 of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. This requires the Council to notify various parties and invite feedback in the form of proposed sites for consideration within the new Local Plan.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 30 As far as possible, the cost of preparing the new Local Plan has been reflected in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2025-29, and is being updated for the proposed MTFS 2026 – 2030, however this will need to be kept under review in the light of future changes to the legal and national policy framework for Local Plan preparation. The MTFS takes account of an existing earmarked reserve for Local Plan preparation. The current MTFS includes a budget of £2,309,064.00 and through more detailed resource planning, proposals have been made to increase this to £2,574,000.

Human Resources

- 31 Human resources support will be required to support appropriate resourcing of the Strategic Planning team.

Risk Management

- 32 Appropriate risk management will be carried out as an integral part of the Plan's project management.

Impact on other Committees

- 33 A new Local Plan will contain planning policies, affecting all communities across Cheshire East and therefore will potentially support and shape decisions that are taken by other committees.

Policy

- 34

Commitment 1: Unlocking prosperity for all The Local Plan establishes a land use framework for the borough which supports inward investment and delivery of infrastructure, jobs and homes.	Commitment 2: Improving health and wellbeing Policies brought forward via the Local Plan will help shape communities to secure good design, improvements to the natural environment and a range of infrastructure that supports health and wellbeing.	Commitment 3: An effective and enabling Council An adopted Local Plan enables the Council to take decisions on planning applications with greater certainty providing stability for officers, members and applicants.
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Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 35 A communications strategy is being prepared to ensure an inclusive approach to engagement. Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out during future stages of Plan preparation.

Other Implications

- 36 The new Local Plan will provide an opportunity to go further with planning policies to mitigate climate change, recognising the Council's pledge to become a carbon neutral borough by 2045.
- 37 There is an opportunity to promote health within the new Local Plan and an update to the Local Plan would contain planning policies for the whole of the borough, including rural areas.
- 38 The well-being of young people and cared for children could be an important objective that any revised policies may seek to support.

Consultation

Name of Consultee	Post held	Date sent	Date returned
<i>Statutory Officer (or deputy) :</i>			
Ashley Hughes	S151 Officer	23/10/25	27/10/25
Hilary Irving	Interim Deputy Monitoring Officer	30/10/25	30/10/25
<i>Legal and Finance</i>			
James Thomas	Principal Planning & Highways Solicitor	01/10/25	02/10/25
Wendy Broadhurst	Principal Accountant (Place)		
<i>Other Consultees:</i> <i>Directors</i>			
Chris Allman	Director of Planning and Environment	29/09/25	22/10/25
Phil Cresswell	Executive Director – Place	27/10/25	27/10/25

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Tom Evans, Angela Johnson tom.evans@cheshireeast.gov.uk, angela.johnson@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Appendix 1: Call for Sites 2024 Appendix 2: Local Plan Programme Appendix 3: Finalised Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment Methodology Appendix 4: Summary of Key National Planning Reforms Appendix 5: Proposed Local Plan Evidence Base
Background Papers:	n/a