

Cheshire East Rural Action Plan

2022 -26



Cheshire East Rural Action Plan 2022/23 -2025/26

Introduction

As part of delivering its Corporate Plan outcomes, the Council has undertaken to build a thriving and sustainable place and as part of that aim it seeks to have thriving urban and rural economies with opportunities for all with thriving and active rural communities. This Rural Action Plan has a focus on the economy in Rural areas. However, the rural economy does not sit in isolation from other factors, so a wider range of topics need to be considered including the environment, health, and connectivity. The Plan therefore provides a broader framework for the economy that takes into account relevant policy and strategic direction, but with a rural focus. It builds upon previous work by the Council to support its Rural area including the Rural Action Plan 2018/19-2021/22¹. It is intended that this plan will provide a framework that supports consideration of policy and strategic direction for the rural area, positioning the Council to be able to respond to changes at national and local level.

Background and context

Cheshire East is defined by the Rural Services Network SPARSE classification as a council considered 'predominantly rural', while the Defra Rural Classification for the Borough is 'urban with significant rural'².



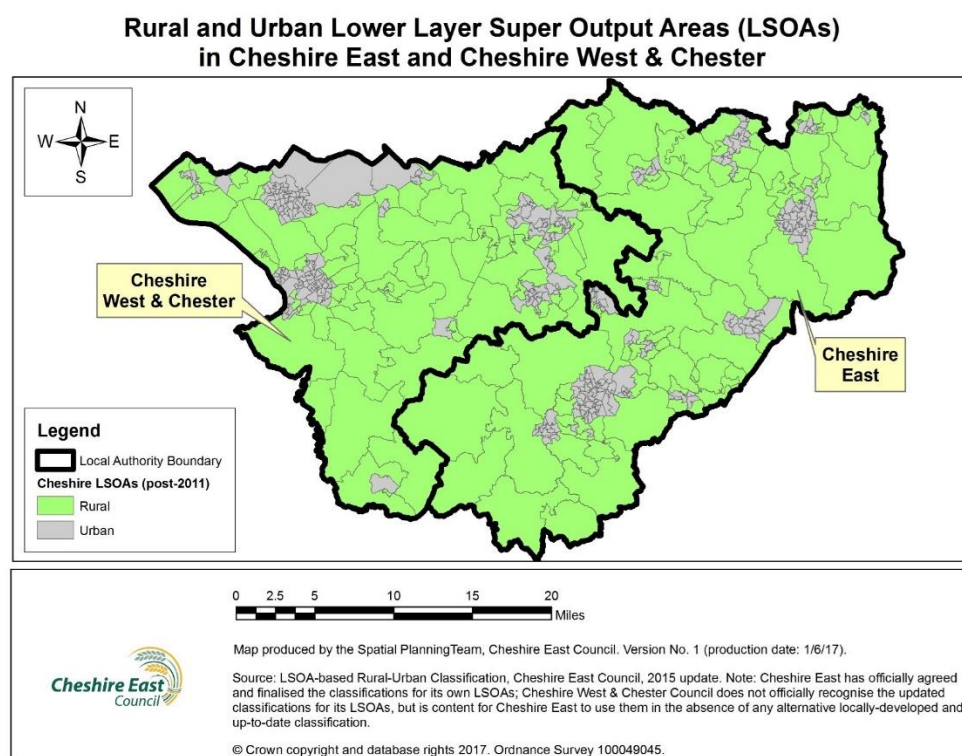
Whatever the definition, the rural aspect of Cheshire East is significant in terms of population, economic impact, and its contribution to the borough's 'quality of place'.

¹ [Rural Cheshire East](https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk) (Cheshireeast.gov.uk)

² (DEFRA)_Statistical_Digest_of_Rural_England_2022_June_edition.pdf (publishing.service.gov.uk)

The Rural area is an important aspect of the borough's character but brings with it both the constraints and opportunities that are peculiar to rural areas.

148,400 people³, nearly two fifths of Cheshire East's total population (386,700), live in rural areas. The quality of its natural environment and excellent location, combined with factors such as high educational attainment and employment opportunities, ensure that Cheshire East is a place offering a high quality of life to its residents and is an attractive place to do business; a place where people want to live, work and visit.



Cheshire East was traditionally, and remains in many places, a rural area, with agriculture (particularly dairy) and land-based industries, a network of villages and mid-sized market towns serving as important service and functional centres. Alongside their roles as retail, commercial, educational and leisure focal points, these places historically developed specialisms, including extractive industries, chemicals and silk.

Stewardship of the rural environment is central to achieving this balance between economic growth and environmental and societal wellbeing. Rural economies have demonstrated their potential to provide more growth and employment if given appropriate stimuli and support from national and local business leaders or policy makers.

³ Source: Mid-year population estimates for small areas for 2020, Office for National Statistics (ONS). ONS Crown Copyright. Note: Figures based on 2015 Rural-Urban Classification for Cheshire East (at Lower Layer Super Output Area level), Research & Consultation Team, Cheshire East Council.

In 2020, GVA from Urban with Significant Rural areas (such as Cheshire East) contributed 12.5 per cent (£210 billion) of England's GVA⁴. This compares with Predominantly Rural areas contributing 15.0 per cent worth an estimated £253 billion, 44.6 per cent from Predominantly Urban areas (excluding London) (£750 billion), and 27.9 per cent from London (£470 billion). All area types have seen small decreases for total GVA since 2019.

It is not surprising that key sectors are focussed on the land and landscape: agriculture, tourism, forestry. However, a majority of rural business is in other sectors⁵, including renewable energy generation; advanced manufacturing and engineering; logistics; food and drink manufacturing, agri-tech and bio-renewables; financial & professional services and healthcare technology.

The economy in rural areas plays an important role in Cheshire East. The rural area boasts a diverse industry base, and the Council continues to play an important role in taking forward rural economic strategy in the sub-region. Traditional land-based businesses, the wider countryside, its rural tourism assets and events form an important part of local economy and the wider character of the sub-region. However, alongside traditional large-scale dairy and land-based enterprises, there are significant tourism businesses, creative & digital industries, distribution, science and technology businesses, with the rural areas of Cheshire East contributing a significant part of the area's economy.

There is real economic value in the area's natural capital and landscape character, and the contribution of farming and land management should not be underestimated or forgotten. It is after all, what underpins our rural character, environment and communities, contributing to our 'quality of place', which is accepted as an economic attribute, supporting locational decisions and investment in the area. It has been argued that those places with strong 'quality of place' attributes can stand out from their competitors and therefore stand a better chance of landing new investment and skilled workers. An 'emotional connection' to a place can become as important as more rational, number-driven determinants, particularly for knowledge workers. Cheshire East's rural character offers these attributes.

The agri-food sector in Cheshire East is well developed and diverse. This sector comprises of a range of companies from large scale food manufacturers and animal feed businesses to dairy operators, salad producers and small-scale operations (including traditional cheese producers, farm shops, breweries and distilleries). Like the visitor economy, agri-food is an important sector in Cheshire East's economy based in rural areas. Although representing a relatively small portion of the district's

⁴ Source: 'Rural productivity and gross value added (GVA)', Statistical Digest of Rural England, Defra, July 2022 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/rural-productivity>)

⁵ Source: UK Business Counts (enterprises) data (for 2021), Office for National Statistics, NOMIS.

economic output (in terms of GVA), they both employ a high number of people and are important to the character of the area and its 'quality of place'.

The Council has a direct involvement in agricultural land through the Cheshire Farms Service, which was created to manage the agricultural estates of both Cheshire West and Chester Council and Cheshire East Council on their formation as unitary authorities in 2009. Cheshire East Council retains an estate of 4833 acres with a range of entry level farm types and sizes, providing opportunities to suitably qualified persons to enter agriculture.

Land management industries are important to Cheshire but the economy in rural areas reaches far beyond this in terms of jobs, enterprises, and output. The rural areas are now home to a wide range of other businesses that appreciate the rural setting, including professional services and digital/creative. The 'Science Corridor' in Cheshire East has many businesses based in rural locations with strengths in advanced scientific analysis and research, pharmaceuticals R&D, energy and radio-astronautics and astronomy. Alongside strategic employment sites based in a rural setting such as Alderley Park, Radbroke Hall, Waters (Wilmslow) and Jodrell Bank, the rural area supports a diverse economy of SMEs and micro-businesses. Beyond the strategic sites, agri-food and the visitor economy remain the most visibly significant rural-based sectors, but with the development of high-speed broadband coverage, professional, knowledge based, creative and digital businesses are also important.

In general, rural areas can have lower unemployment than urban areas 2011 Census figures (still the latest Census data – but release of 2021 Census data due to begin within a few months) put the proportion of economically active 16-74-year-olds who were unemployed at 3.2% in the Borough's rural areas, but 5.4% in its urban areas.⁶

However, rural wages can often be lower⁷, especially those in agriculture and tourism where their seasonal nature can affect earnings. When combined in areas – predominantly rural – with higher house and fuel prices, the result can in some cases lead to instability of income levels, disparities in access to services and pockets of deprivation. One of the priorities for economic strategy can therefore be to seek to increase employment opportunities, reduce seasonality and champion the creation of better-paid wages in certain sectors.

Self-employment in the rural areas is higher than in urban areas and higher than the national average. Of those 16–74-year-old residents of Cheshire East who were in employment at the time of the 2011 Census, 16.6% were self-employed (similar to the England average of 15.7%), but this proportion is much greater (22.3%) in the

⁶ Source: 2011 Census, Office for National Statistics (ONS). ONS Crown Copyright. Note: Figures based on 2015 Rural-Urban Classification for Cheshire East (at Lower Layer Super Output Area level), Research & Consultation Team, Cheshire East Council.

⁷ Source: [Rural earnings - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)]

Borough's rural areas than in its urban areas (13.2%)⁸. The impact of the Covid pandemic and the increase in home working that resulted, have added an additional context.

Furthermore, due to the pandemic and its related restrictions, the value of Cheshire East's Visitor Economy fell to £548million⁹. Prior to that, in 2019 it was worth circa £994million, supporting over 11,000 fte jobs¹⁰, and was forecast to reach over £1bn by 2020. The rural offer (and its related heritage) is a very important component of our visitor economy and there remain opportunities to improve destination management, increase the availability of quality accommodation, and exploit specialist sector-based experiences (including filming and events) to allow the sector's contribution to increase once more and maintain a competitive position.

However, the rural economy does not sit in isolation from other factors which can impact upon its growth, sustainability and resilience: Planning, affordable housing, public transport, access to health facilities, education, older people's services, fuel poverty, viable local services, character/quality of environment and community engagement are all part of an associated matrix. Key areas for consideration in respect to the rural economy are:

- **Planning:** Positive planning allows rural communities to adapt and thrive. This must offer policies that reflect local circumstances and provide a workable planning system, which both engages and gains the trust of rural communities. The use of neighbourhood plans, and supplementary planning guidance may be appropriate tools in some circumstances.
- **Quality/character of environment:** quality of place can be a significant factor in locational decisions to live, work or invest, providing an 'emotional connection' and it is essential to visitor economy success. Prosperous places are supported by their inherent environmental, cultural or heritage characteristics.
- **Affordable Housing:** Rural communities need to be places where people from a range of age groups and backgrounds can live. Housing affordability is therefore a key concern with a need for affordable homes to meet the needs of rural communities, the economy in rural areas and address the issue of key workers. This needs to be addressed within the context of compliance with adopted planning policies.
- **Public transport:** Suitable public transport links are important to helping small businesses access markets or making it practical for employees to seek work in rural communities. Transport can also bring customers and tourists to local rural businesses such as shops, hotels and B&Bs. In 2019,

⁸ Source: 2011 Census, Office for National Statistics (ONS). ONS Crown Copyright. Note: Figures based on 2015 Rural-Urban Classification for Cheshire East (at Lower Layer Super Output Area level), Research & Consultation Team, Cheshire East Council.

⁹ Source: Annual STEAM data for economic value of visitor economy in Cheshire East

¹⁰ Annual STEAM data for Cheshire East.

at least 75% of the rural population in Cheshire East (based on a Sunday off-peak timetable) were located within 400 metres of a bus stop and had a service that could reach a principal town or key service centre in 40 minutes. When considering peak demands, such as during a weekday, over 80% of the population were able to access a bus stop located within 400 metres.

- Tackling fuel poverty: Rural areas generally have a higher proportion of households in fuel poverty¹¹, with many off the mains gas network or living in solid wall homes.
- Viable village services: Local services such as village shops, pubs and post offices are at the heart of functioning communities, as well as offering a lifeline to many vulnerable residents. Investment in local services not only benefits communities but also employee recruitment and new business development.
- Schools: Small and rural schools are important in functioning rural communities.
- Broadband and mobile connectivity: Rural businesses and communities need to share in the opportunities available with fast broadband services, but some are harder to reach than their urban counterparts. Poor connectivity or 'Not-spots' in some rural areas is a problem for residents unable to access digital services - 'Digital Poverty'. However, it can also impact economic development as businesses that rely on digital communications and routes to market may not wish to locate where they would be disadvantaged. Remaining businesses and the self-employed are unable to reap any of the productivity benefits and opportunities of digital connectivity and are constrained in their growth.
- Road Network: There is a strong interdependence between rural and urban economies. Urban centres are often major markets for rural based businesses and many rural residents work in local urban areas. Therefore, in order to realise the true potential of the rural economy, connectivity needs to be reduced as a barrier to trade and economic growth between urban and rural areas. The added benefit of good transport services is that it will attract visitors and their spending power to rural economies.
- Climate change: Cheshire East is a significantly rural area, with the Council owning or managing a range of agricultural and rural land holdings and having significant influence over development and land management elsewhere. Our rural areas have the potential to make a significant contribution to meeting the Borough's (and UK's) carbon reduction targets, and to improving the resilience of our economy to climate impacts. As an organisation, the Council has a target of achieving net-zero by 2025 and

¹¹ Table 4, Fuel Poverty Supplementary Tables – England – 2022 (2020 data), Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, February 2022: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fuel-poverty-supplementary-tables-2022>

has joined UK100 (Countryside Climate Network) with a pledge to support the borough achieving net-zero by 2045.

Developing a Rural Action Plan

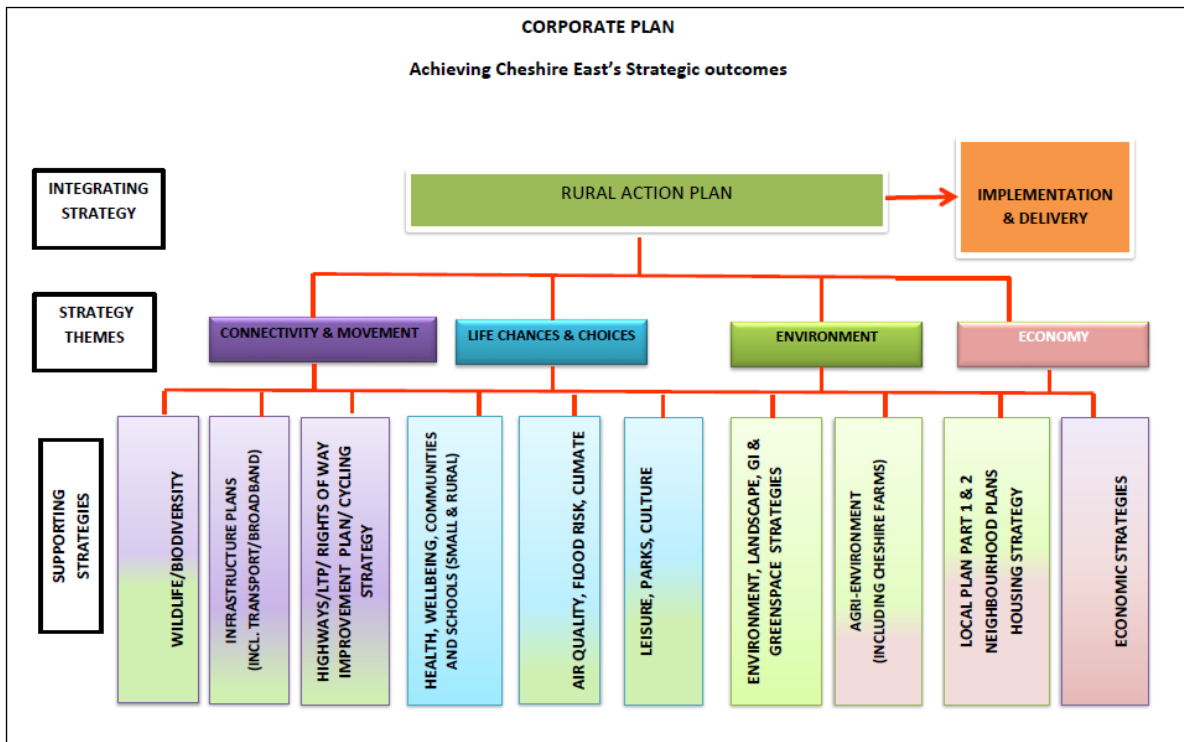
148,400 people, nearly two fifths of Cheshire East's total population (386,700), live in rural areas outside of the main towns. Therefore, there is a need to ensure that delivery of our corporate outcomes meets the needs of rural communities. The rural area is also part of Cheshire East's 'quality of place', contributing to economic well-being by offering characteristics that are part of the area's distinctiveness. Studies have shown how quality of place influences locational decisions with innovators and entrepreneurs attracted to creative, cultural and beautiful places.

A draft Rural Strategy Action Plan was produced in 2014 following review and consultation but was not formally approved. This was superseded by the 'Where Rural Communities Matter' document in early 2015 which outlined a number of key actions. The Rural Action Plan adopted in 2019 built on the successful aspects of this approach offering a more coherent action plan with agreed timelines and accountability helping link rural economic strategy to other key strategies and outcomes rather than being separate from them.

Under the guidance of a Member Advisory Group, appointed by the Economy and Growth Committee in September 2021, officers representing services across the Council have drawn on research, external advice and service experience to identify a number of key priorities and suggested actions across a number of strategic issues.

Cheshire East Council's rural action plan is set in the context of how existing strategies deliver on the rural agenda and at the same time, helping to identify those gaps that need to be addressed in the future. There is also a need to consider the role of the rural agenda in informing the Council's approach to the wider economy and to look at future funding arrangements in the round, including the Shared Prosperity Fund and any changes to arrangements for agriculture and the environment resulting from Brexit. Both national and local Environment Strategies are also of significance in influencing the rural agenda. While future national funding arrangements for agriculture and the environment are still in development to some degree, they will reflect many aspects that shape the character and nature of the rural area and its contribution to 'public goods'.

In the meantime, a number of Council strategies and plans that relate to the rural principles or priorities have been identified and their contribution audited against four themes of connectivity, life chances and choices, environment and economy. It is hoped that this framework will guide consideration of policy and strategic direction. The diagram below illustrates how a framework provides a cross-cutting approach to considering and integrating actions from a range of relevant strategies and plans, providing the basis for developing a Rural action plan. It is not intended to replace or take precedence over these strategies, but rather to allow consideration of how these may impact on the rural area or rural affairs.



The overall aim of the plan is to help inform strategic choices as part of meeting the Council's strategic outcomes and identify priorities regarding the rural area. This is based on the Council's existing strategies and plans along with their related evidence base. It does not replace those strategies and plans, but rather provides a rural focus on them to help decision makers ensure that the rural community, economy, and environment are understood and to help to co-ordinate actions. This is part of an ongoing process that needs to be able to adapt to reflect changes.

There are a number of emerging challenges, including fuel poverty and the cost-of-living crisis, which are very relevant to the economy and our rural communities. These issues are likely to impact on finances, becoming a source of stress and threat to the rural areas of Cheshire East. These and other emerging issues that may affect the rural area will not necessarily have plans in place to address them. Therefore, while it is not intended to be a comprehensive list, appendix 1 identifies a number of key issues that have been identified during the plan development, which may need further consideration over the life of the plan.

A changing landscape for the Rural Action Plan

While the framework and many of the thematic priorities identified in the first Rural Action Plan will remain valid, there have been significant changes to the context in which these may be viewed. The emphasis and detail will need to reflect economic recovery from the pandemic, any impact of changes due to Brexit (eg changes to agricultural payments and a move to Environmental Land Management schemes) and climate change policy.

In addition, since the original Rural Action Plan, the Council has an Environment Strategy and Carbon Action Plan and a new Corporate Plan for the period 2021-2025. Specifically, the Corporate Plan identifies the need for 'Thriving and active rural communities', and the need for a Rural action plan.

Covid-19:

Since 2020 the Covid Pandemic has impacted on the economy, communities and individuals. In April 2020, staff at the Centre for Rural Economy and Rural Enterprise UK (Newcastle University), published a briefing note on COVID-19 and rural economies¹². On the one hand, the paper highlights how the dispersed population base and established tradition of home working acted as a source of resilience during the crisis. On the other hand, restrictions placed on personal travel for non-essential purposes may have disproportionately impacted on rural areas due to the greater dispersal of workplaces, consumer and business services, and because of the importance of visitor economies to many rural areas.

The OECD Regional Outlook 2021 highlighted vulnerabilities because rural areas have a less diversified economy, a larger share of workers in essential jobs (e.g. agriculture, food processing) coupled with limited ability to undertake these jobs at home and poorer broadband infrastructure¹³. It is self-evident that the COVID-19 pandemic increased reliance on digital connectivity, which impacts on economic activity, service delivery and on the well-being of rural communities. The OECD report indicates that lower incomes and fewer savings forced many rural residents to continue to work and not seek medical help if they needed it. Shortages of seasonal and temporary workers have also been a significant challenge, creating additional burdens for rural food businesses.

Rural economy, agricultural policy and levelling-up:

In March 2021 the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) published its first annual rural proofing report, *Rural Proofing in England 2020*. This followed a commitment in the Government's response to the House of Lords Select

¹² Phillipson J, Gorton M, Turner R, Shucksmith M, Aitken-McDermott K, Areal F, Cowie P, Hubbard C, Maioli S, McAreavey R, Souza-Monteiro D, Newbery R, Panzone L, Rowe F, Shortall S. [The COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Implications for Rural Economies](#). *Sustainability* 2020, **12**(10), 3973.

¹³ [OECD Regional Outlook 2021: Addressing COVID-19 and Moving to Net Zero Greenhouse Gas Emissions | en | OECD](#)

Committee on the Rural Economy Report 'Time for a strategy for the rural economy'. Although it primarily addresses nationally applicable policy and there was little that directly addressed rural needs or opportunities, it did point place a focus on policies such as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, Levelling Up Fund and agricultural transition plan.

The government's White Paper, 'Levelling up the United Kingdom' released on 2nd February 2022 brings together a number of policy strands and funding initiatives that have developed over the past few years, particularly since the 2020 Spending Review. These include a centrally managed funding package which includes the Levelling Up Fund, the Freeport Programme, Future High Streets Fund and the Towns Fund; a renewed priority to develop deals for the devolution of powers and funding with all areas across England through 'County Deals'; and a new formula allocated fund to replace EU structural funds, the 'Shared Prosperity Fund'. Any approach to levelling-up will need to take account of the rural-urban mix of the area, whether considering just Cheshire East or the wider sub-region.

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF)¹⁴ is in effect, succession funding for the EU structural funds. The UKSPF will provide £3 billion of new funding (revenue and capital) for local investment by March 2025. With an overarching aim of building pride in place and increasing life chances, there are three UKSPF investment priorities: communities and place; supporting local business; and people and skills. With all areas of the UK receiving a conditional allocation via a funding formula rather than through a competitive bidding process, there is scope to direct funding where it is needed reflecting need and opportunity right across the borough as set out in a Local Investment Plan submitted to Government for approval.

In January 2021, Defra published their Agricultural Transition Plan¹⁵ for 2021-2024 setting out the Government's plan for the new agricultural policy in England, starting when the UK left the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). It includes details of the cuts in the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) over the 4 years although there is a lack of detail on the opportunities and schemes that will replace it. The Government has committed to investing the same total amount each year, through the life of this Parliament, to the end of 2024. The funding cuts from BPS will be recycled into other schemes such as productivity grants schemes and pilots for the new schemes. Environmental land management (ELMS) pilot schemes are now in place, being the Sustainable Farming Incentive scheme, Local Nature Recovery and Landscape Recovery. The outcome of these schemes will help shape the future of farming in England.

¹⁴ UK Shared Prosperity Fund: prospectus - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

¹⁵ The Path to Sustainable Farming: An Agricultural Transition Plan 2021 to 2024
Agricultural Transition Plan 2021 to 2024 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Climate change:

Our changing climate is requiring us to do things differently – in rural areas this means reducing use of hydrocarbons, increasing sequestration of carbon already in the atmosphere, and ensuring resilience to the impacts of climate change.

The Government has set a legally binding target for the UK to reduce greenhouse gases to ‘net zero’ by 2050 and in October 2021 published its *Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener*¹⁶. The Strategy sets out decarbonisation pathways and supporting policies and programmes to reduce emissions for each sector plus some cross-cutting actions.

While they are not well articulated in the strategy, there are sectors that have been identified where there is a particular rural dimension that needs consideration¹⁷:

Heat and buildings: Rural areas are disproportionately ‘off grid’ and reliant on oil or LPG for heating. Heat pumps are often cited as the main technology for reaching net zero although there is a question as to whether heat pumps are the right solution in older and poorly insulated rural homes.

Transport: Achieving net-zero will require greater take up of low emission vehicles, the related expansion of electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure and a modal shift to public transport, walking and cycling. delivered in rural areas. All of these have challenges in a rural area.

Natural resources: Farming will be encouraged to engage with low carbon practices through the introduction of the ELMS (replacing the CAP) and the NFU has introduced its own strategy for the sector to help achieve net-zero. Nature-based solutions such as restoring peatland, the creation of new woodland or soil management through regenerative farming, will mostly affect rural areas and will have rural landscape and biodiversity impacts. In addition, nature-based solutions can offer remedial measures to address the impacts of a changing climate, such as increased heat stress and flood risk.

There are a wide range of risks posed by climate change in our rural areas¹⁸, increased extreme weather and volatility will increase risks to soil conditions and water supplies, and increased pests, pathogens and invasive species. All of which will impact upon landscape character and increase the risks of food insecurity.

Cheshire East priorities and Corporate Plan:

Cheshire East Council adopted a new Corporate Plan¹⁹ for the period 2021-2025. The Plan is based around a key vision of being **open, fair and green**, leading to the

¹⁶ [Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/net-zero-strategy)

¹⁷ Rural Services Network: Rural Lens Review: Net Zero Strategy (December 2021)

¹⁸ [Independent Assessment of UK Climate Risk - Climate Change Committee \(theccc.org.uk\)](https://theccc.org.uk)

¹⁹ [Corporate Plan \(cheshireeast.gov.uk\)](https://cheshireeast.gov.uk)

following strategic priorities: An open and enabling organisation; A council which empowers and cares about people; A thriving and sustainable place. The Council has undertaken to build a thriving and sustainable place and as part of that aim it seeks to have thriving urban and rural economies with opportunities for all with thriving and active rural communities. The Plan specifically refers to the Rural Action Plan and a number of actions and outcomes that are specific to the rural area. It also sets out corporate actions and priorities that are of wider application, but will impact on the rural area, its communities, its environment, and its economy.

As well as the Corporate Plan a number of strategic priorities have been addressed since the previous Plan was published. These include completion of the Planning Site Allocations and Development Policies Document²⁰, the Environment Strategy²¹ and a Carbon Action Plan²², all of which have a significant relevance to the rural area of Cheshire East.

²⁰ [Revised Publication Draft Site Allocations and Development Policies Document \(clean version for print\) \(cheshireeast.gov.uk\)](#)

²¹ [Environment Strategy \(cheshireeast.gov.uk\)](#)

²² [Carbon Neutral Council \(cheshireeast.gov.uk\)](#)

Progress against the Rural Action Plan 2019-22

Digital Connectivity: Broadband & mobile:

The Digital Cheshire ERDF project successfully completed and overdelivered on every contractual output, resulting in 96.44% broadband coverage. Out of the 205 businesses assisted (contracted profile was 180 businesses) 116 business were based within Cheshire East.

BDUK launched a Gigabit Vouchers scheme that enables Local Voucher Top Up scheme and development of this scheme for Cheshire has commenced. Data and input were provided to the Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to support the development of a Digital Strategy for the sub-region. The LEP published a Digital Infrastructure Plan in October 2020 to support the development and leverage of investment in digital connectivity infrastructure. Cheshire East Council published its Digital Strategy²³ in 2022, which aims for a sustainable digital infrastructure and a vibrant digital economy, including an ambition that 'All residents and businesses will be able to access high speed broadband in their home or locality'.

Access for residents, business, and visitors:

Public Rights of Way have achieved an average of 83% of the network classed as 'easy to use' against a target of 80%. The lowest level was in 2019 (70%) due to significant storm impacts and resultant damage to infrastructure. The highest achieved was 93% in 2020, despite pressure caused by high levels of use once the pandemic started.

The Rights of Way Investment Plan²⁴ (ROWIP) remains valid until 2026 and continues to be progressed. However, resources constraints have impacted on the ability to develop some implementation plans since 2019.

The Local Transport Plan (LTP)²⁵, adopted by the Council in October 2019, covers the period between 2019 and 2024. This provides a strategic (Borough-wide) approach to transport. Local Transport Development Plans (LTDPs, which are called Town Plans in the LTP), have been produced to support the delivery of transport schemes at a local level. LTDPs have been developed for each key service centre and principal town, including surrounding rural areas. Five LTDPs were approved by the Highways and Transport Committee in March 2022, with the remaining six anticipated to be approved by Committee in June 2022.

²³ [Cheshire East Digital Strategy](https://cheshireeast.gov.uk/digital-strategy) (Cheshireeast.gov.uk)

²⁴ [Improving our Public Rights of Way Network](https://cheshireeast.gov.uk/improving-our-public-rights-of-way-network) (cheshireeast.gov.uk)

²⁵ [Local Transport Plan](https://cheshireeast.gov.uk/local-transport-plan) (cheshireeast.gov.uk)

The Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) for Crewe, Congleton, Macclesfield and Wilmslow were adopted by the Council in March 2021. Their respective Implementation Plans were adopted in November 2021.

These Plans complement other schemes being brought forward in non-LCWIP areas that are being delivered through the STEPS/ Sustainable Modes of Travel to School (SMOTs) and active travel programmes, which include improvements in rural areas. In addition to the LCWIPs, a wide range of walking and cycling schemes are included within Local Transport Development Plans.

The Little Bus Service was relaunched as FlexiLink in September 2019. This operates during the core hours between 09.30am and 2.30pm, Monday to Friday. While the number of passengers using the service has dropped compared to pre COVID-19, demand for the service has gradually recovered. At the end of April 2022, demand was approximately one third lower than pre-COVID-19.

Additionally, a three-year pilot scheme called the 'Go-too' Service²⁶ was launched in October 2021 following receipt of £1.25 million of funding from the Rural Mobility Fund. This scheme covers a wide area to the south and south-west of Nantwich and operates between 7am and 9pm, Monday to Saturday, with low floor access.

Rural Housing:

There was a target to increase the provision of affordable homes on rural exceptions sites by 10% by 2021. 17 units were delivered in 2018/19. No rural exception sites have been delivered since then, although one is in planning that would deliver a further 10 or 11 units.

Many aspects have been delayed through the pandemic, but the groundwork has been developed further; A Housing Development Framework was established in 2021 and a Rural Housing Enabling Guide has been incorporated into emerging Housing Supplementary Planning Document²⁷ (SPD). There has also been engagement with Cheshire Community Action to understand process for CLH schemes throughout 2021. A workshop was held in March 2022 to gauge the appetite for Parish Councils to explore the CLH option. Existing Neighbourhood Plans are also being reviewed to assess appetite for affordable housing delivery.

Strong, supportive rural places and communities:

The 'tartan' rug²⁸ which provides an overview of health and wellbeing in all wards including rural, has been maintained and reviewed, most recently in February 2021 with results reported to the Adults and Health Committee in March 2022. This was reported as part of the Council's Live Well for Longer plan²⁹, which aligns to the

²⁶ www.go-too.co.uk

²⁷ [Housing Supplementary Planning Document \(cheshireeast.gov.uk\)](https://cheshireeast.gov.uk/housing-supplementary-planning-document)

²⁸ [Joint Strategic Needs Assessment \(cheshireeast.gov.uk\)](https://cheshireeast.gov.uk/joint-strategic-needs-assessment)

²⁹ [\(Public Pack\)Agenda Document for Adults and Health Committee, 28/03/2022 10:30 \(cheshireeast.gov.uk\)](https://cheshireeast.gov.uk/public-pack-agenda-document-for-adults-and-health-committee-28-03-2022-10-30)

council's Corporate Plan 2021-25, addressing the aim: 'to reduce inequalities, promote fairness and opportunity for all and support our most vulnerable residents'. A key commitment within the plan reads: 'Our rural areas will not be disadvantaged in access to services'; there are actions identified within the Implementation Plan to address this commitment and further actions to be added as necessary during formal consultation.

Because commissioning data varies depending on the contract/service, it has not been possible to identify uptake in services specifically in rural areas as this depends on the Information sharing specified for each contract. With regard to the mental health and wellbeing of people, by assessing the levels of loneliness and social isolation in rural areas across the borough, work has not been progressed due to the pandemic and a new baseline will need to be established.

The public health team are encouraging and supporting Town Partnerships to help meet health outcomes and currently working with Crewe Town Council as part of Increasing Equality Commission, which may provide lessons for other such partnerships.

With regard to developing rural neighbourhood partnerships, a Locality Model is being developed in place of a functionality model. This will take into considerations of the rural agenda and needs. A Connected Communities Strategy³⁰ was launched in 2021. In addition, a crowdfunding platform was launched in August 2021, this provides an opportunity to connect Town and Parish Councils, CEC, private sector and local people to create and back projects that meet local needs. This provides a new collaborative funding approach.

With regard to education, rural schools have often had challenges to attend support training on school improvement. However, the move to virtual working through the pandemic has helped rural schools to attend.

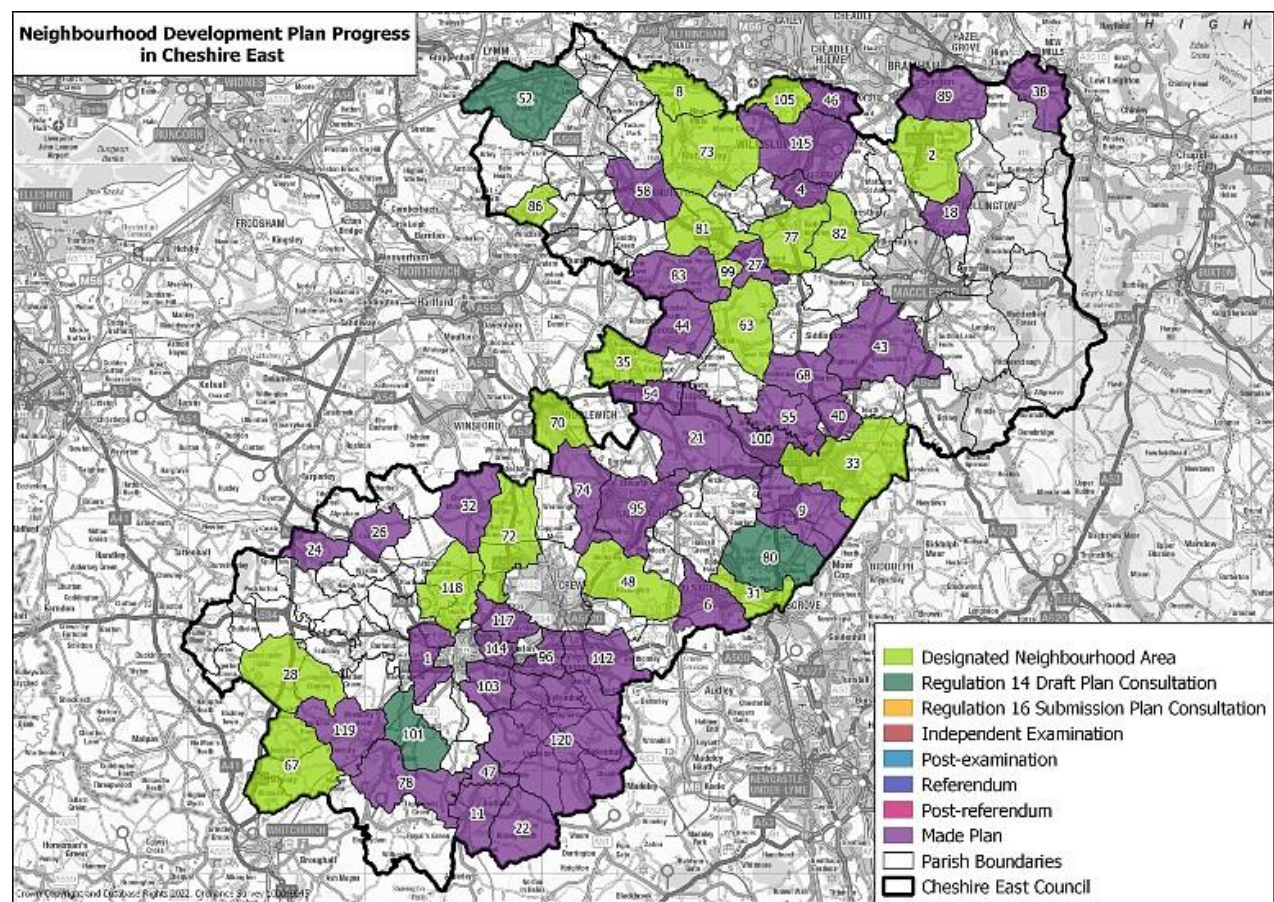
The appointment of a Headteacher role in small schools often requires a teaching commitment and may require rural schools to consider an executive role across more than one school. As at the end of the 2021/22 academic year, the local authority managed to secure leadership roles in all our rural schools ahead of the new academic year.

Neighbourhood planning:

Support for local councils has continued, putting in place Neighbourhood Development Plans that help shape their areas and enhance quality of life in rural communities. This includes working with rural communities who have identified a need for affordable housing within their Neighbourhood plans and review of adopted plans to ensure they continue to align with and inform the boroughs wider strategy.

³⁰ [Connected Communities \(cheshireeast.gov.uk\)](https://cheshireeast.gov.uk)

A total of 36 neighbourhood plans are now in place³¹. Neighbourhood planning provides a powerful set of tools for local people to plan for the types of development to meet their community's needs and where the ambition of the neighbourhood is aligned with the strategic needs and priorities of the wider local area.



Planning for a green and sustainable place:

The Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy³² (LPS) is a Development Plan Document that forms the first part of the Local Plan for Cheshire East. It sets out the case for sustainable economic growth and will have implications for the management of development in Cheshire East up to 2030. The Local Plan Strategy was adopted in July 2017 with the Site Allocations and Development Policies Document (SADPD- part 2 of the Local plan) submitted to the Secretary of State on 29 April 2021.

The SADPD³³ provides further detailed and non-strategic planning policies and land allocations in line with the strategy set out in the LPS. The Part 2 Plan is close to

³¹ [Neighbourhood Planning \(cheshireeast.gov.uk\)](https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/planning/neighbourhood-planning/)

³² <https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/pdf/planning/local-plan/local-plan-strategy-web-version-1.pdf>
Interactive map [Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy 2010-2030](https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/planning/spatial-planning/cheshire_east_local_plan/site-allocations-and-policies/site_allocations_and_policies.aspx)

³³ https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/planning/spatial-planning/cheshire_east_local_plan/site-allocations-and-policies/site_allocations_and_policies.aspx

completion with consultation on the main modifications until 31 May 2022. It is expected to be adopted by the end of 2022.

The Plan includes detailed development management policies for rural areas. Section 6 of the SADPD specifically addresses 'Rural Issues', including agriculture and rural buildings. Policies also address aspects such as diversification, the best and most Versatile agricultural land, landscape character, green infrastructure, and biodiversity. A supplementary Planning Document has been prepared regarding Biodiversity Net Gain and is due for adoption by the end of 2022. No other SPDs related specifically to rural issues are currently in the pipeline. However, a Housing SPD and Environmental Protection SPD do have some, limited, cross over and are expected to be adopted by the end of 2022. The first draft Minerals and Waste Plan is due to be published mid-2022, with adoption expected by early 2024.

Cheshire East's Green Infrastructure plan³⁴ was published in 2019. The Plan highlights some strategic areas for further consideration and suggests some approaches to partnership working. The Plan provides an evidence base and framework to develop projects that deliver a net gain in green infrastructure and was used as evidence in the development of the Local Plan. In 2020/21 Cheshire East has been a pilot for the development of national Green Infrastructure standards 2020/21. The work was developed further with the completion of a sub-regional Natural Capital Assessment and investment plan at the end of 2021. It will be used as part of the evidence base for the development of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Cheshire and Warrington with work starting in 2022. Part of the Farm estate was included in a pilot natural capital study with the intent of informing management options appraisals.

The Countryside Service and Tatton Park continue to develop the ecological quality and biodiversity of our SSSI/LNR's and countryside estate. The Farms Service continues to seek improvement in standards of estate management, good environmental practice and stewardship of the Council's farm estate whilst providing opportunities to suitably qualified persons to enter agriculture. The content of letting particulars and terms of tenancy agreements is evolving to require new tenants to assess natural capital base lines and implement plans that deliver continuous improvement.

The Council published its Environment Strategy and Carbon Action Plan in 2020. The Council is progressing its Carbon Action Plan programme to decarbonise buildings, fleet and embed Carbon reduction across the Council through culture change, policy and procurement. For Carbon not able to be reduced the Council is 'insetting' through nature-based solutions (including tree planting) and sustainable energy. To date over 50,000 trees have been planted as part of the programme and its first solar farm will be constructed at Leighton Grange alongside a 7ha woodland

³⁴ [Green Infrastructure \(cheshireeast.gov.uk\)](https://greeninfrastructure.cheshireeast.gov.uk)

planting. A baseline study of the Borough's peatlands was completed in 2021 and an area at Pastures wood Farm near Gawsorth was restored the same year.

Visitor and cultural economy:

Cheshire East's visitor economy was on track to be worth over £1bn by 2020, have reached a value of £994m in 2019. However, the impacts of the pandemic badly hit the sector, with a particular impact on the rural area where much of the tourism infrastructure is based. The latest figures show a value of £548m in 2020.

The Council supported businesses throughout the pandemic with advice, promotion, and the distribution of Government grants. There were several grant schemes specifically targeted at supporting tourism and hospitality businesses. In financial year 2020-21 the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant scheme made payments to 1680 businesses totalling £31,506,939, the Christmas Support Payment Scheme made payments to 274 businesses totalling £274,000, in 2021-22 the Omicron Hospitality and Leisure Grant made payments to 745 businesses totalling £2,641,462. The Council approved a Tourism Recovery Plan in 2021 and has been instrumental in developing a programme to help address the staff and skills shortages in the sector.

As the pandemic hit, the Cheshire East LEADER programme was investing over £350,000 in 10 tourism projects, leveraging over £1m of investment and creating 19.2 fte jobs. Thankfully these and many more tourism businesses have proved resilient, helped by the support given.

The pandemic also affected the Rural Touring Arts programme which saw all performances cancelled. Thanks to a Cultural Recovery Fund grant, the scheme was able to put in place a digital programme and newsletter however the impact on venues and volunteers has been felt across the Borough. The scheme is now operation again, initially with fewer venues involved, as the scheme takes time to rebuild to its full compliment.

Rural based businesses:

The LEADER programme addressed a wider range of rural businesses than just tourism. In addition, grants were given for Farm Productivity, SMEs & Farm Diversification and Rural Services. Grant of £1,022,405 leveraged £2,698,578 of investment and created a further 94 jobs in addition to the rural tourism figures given earlier.

The Council supported rural businesses throughout the pandemic with advice, support, and the distribution of Government grants. More recently 448 businesses based in rural areas benefitted from Phase 3 of the Additional Restrictions Grant from September 2021 to March 2022. Recovery and Growth grants were awarded to 133 businesses in the rural economy with a variety of projects supported including green energy, improved ventilation, expanding manufacturing space, creating

outdoor space, digital transformation and purchase of new machinery and equipment.

Early in the pandemic the Council initiated and hosted a rural liaison group of representative organisations and businesses to ensure good communication and get feedback. This led on to the development at the start of 2021 of a sub-regional Rural Strategy Group as an advisory body, providing guidance and support to the Councils in developing and implementing strategies and action plans to support the long-term physical, social and economic development of the rural area.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS 2022/23 -2025/26

This action plan provides a cross-cutting approach, reflecting the plans and strategies of the Council and the work of partners in delivery. It is aimed at anyone interested in the wellbeing of rural Cheshire East, helping to inform decision makers and policy makers from public, private or voluntary sectors, community groups, wider stakeholders and individuals. The plan is intended to be a flexible resource that reflects the Council's aspirations and enables people and groups to engage in addressing identified priorities. Not all issues and opportunities can be addressed by the plans, strategies and projects set out in the action plan. Therefore appendix 2 tries to capture some of the other matters that the Council may wish to consider its role over the life of the plan. Some of these may lead to further plans and projects in the future.

The first Rural Action Plan identified key priorities and suggested actions across a number of strategic rural issues: connectivity, economy, community (life chances and choices) and environment. This plan adopts the same framework for consistency with the added lens of the Corporate Plan, which was adopted in 2020. Specifically, the Corporate Plan identifies the need for 'Thriving and active rural communities', and the need for a Rural action plan.

However, the emphasis and detail should also reflect economic recovery from the pandemic, any impact of a move to Environmental Land Management schemes (ELMS), climate change policy, and current Council priorities (including the Corporate Plan 2021-2025).

No.	Priority Issues (not necessarily in priority order)	Rural Connectivity	Rural Economy	Rural Community	Rural Environment	Corporate Plan
1.	Digital Connectivity: Broadband and Mobile	√	√	√	√	√
2.	Access for residents, businesses and visitors	√	√	√		√
3.	Rural Housing		√	√	√	√
4.	Strong, supportive rural places and communities		√			√
5.	Planning for a green and sustainable place (including Neighbourhood planning	√	√	√	√	√
6.	Visitor & Cultural Economy	√	√	√		√
7.	Rural Based Businesses	√	√	√		√

Digital Connectivity: Broadband and Mobile

Digital and mobile connectivity is essential to a successful economy in rural areas, particularly taking account of the fact that self-employment is both higher than in urban areas and higher than the national average and where the Covid pandemic has led to a greater shift towards home or hybrid working. However, rural businesses

and communities can often be harder or more expensive to reach than their urban counterparts. The Council continues to address these issues through a sub-regional 'Connecting Cheshire' programme, ensuring that the area can benefit from national funding programmes to improve connectivity.

Alongside this, the Council has adopted a Digital strategy to guide digital approaches to service transformation to benefit customers, residents, businesses, rural communities, and community sectors. It accepts that there are still challenges for connectivity in rural areas, but recognises that these are increasingly important to address, not only for the economy, but for healthcare and the delivery of a range of other services. The overarching Digital Strategy will be supported with detailed plans a series of measures against which our performance can be assessed.

A Digital Inclusion Plan is being developed that will cover reasons people are digitally excluded and identify how best we maximise opportunities to address these. Network connectivity, data poverty, availability of digital devices, ability and/or confidence to use the device, fear of being scammed, concerns re. intrusion etc will all be considered.

Access for residents, businesses and visitors

The Local Transport Plan (LTP) was adopted in 2019 and covers the whole borough. The LTP has a key role to play in supporting the economy of the borough. It also recognises that the LTP supports the provision of high quality, attractive environments which encourage walking, cycling, and public transport whilst also effectively mitigating potential negative impacts of transport infrastructure. It also has a role to play in encouraging sustainable connectivity between our urban centres and their surrounding rural settings. This is due to be refreshed in 2024, taking account of new Government guidance to be published by the end of 2022.

The LTP accepts that rural land-based and non-land based businesses require connections to labour, markets and suppliers whilst rural residents need access to jobs, services, friends and families. However, providing rural accessibility raises different issues than in towns and cities where low population densities tend to make bus services more expensive and more likely to require financial support from the Council. The Council has committed to exploring innovative ways of proving rural connectivity, and is currently running a pilot on-demand 'Go Too' service in the south of the borough. If successful, this may provide an alternative solution for poorly connected areas or services that are no longer viable commercially.

Go-too is funded through a national pilot project and will demonstrate that costs and benefits of Demand-responsive buses in rural areas. Longer term options will be informed by monitoring this pilot scheme.

The Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2011 -26 (ROWIP) is closely integrated with the LTP. The Public Rights of Way (PROW) service is responsible for managing the borough's 1952km network of public rights of way. This is a primarily rural network and includes a number of medium or long-distance routes which are entirely within or pass-through Cheshire East on its public rights of way network.

Rural Housing

The Council's adopted Housing Strategy will be reviewed and updated in 2023. This will consider a number of issues that are of particular importance to rural communities including affordable housing, the ageing population, delivery of rural exception sites and the provision of housing for rural workers. The Site Allocations and Development Policies Document, which contains policies relevant to rural housing will be adopted, while the Local Plan Strategy review will commence, giving a further opportunity to consider housing policies in relation to the rural area.

The delivery of the right type of housing in the right area is vitally important, more so within rural areas. There will also be a focus on community-led housing; exploring options of how the council can support and encourage local residents to take an active role in the delivery of housing for their community.

While the council is reliant on developers and housing associations to bring forward opportunities, the council can support planning applications (subject to compliance with planning policy) which bring forward rural schemes, and there is the potential to put council-owned rural sites through the Framework if they are suitable for housing development.

There are a number of sites currently allocated to the Housing Development Framework. The framework was set up in 2021/22 and a rural site opportunity is anticipated to go through for tender in 2023.

The 'Vulnerable and Older Persons' Housing Strategy sets out the need for suitable accommodation for older adults, including types such as extra care/independent living. For example, bungalows can be requested through the pre-application advice service, although delivery is dependent on the market and developers.

Rural fuel poverty is often driven by an ageing and energy inefficient housing stock and a lack of access to mains gas, together with rising fuel prices and the cost of delivering heating fuel to rural areas. The Council will take advantage of any funding opportunities to retrofit the housing stock and promote access to trustworthy retrofit advice.

Strong, supportive rural places and communities

Cheshire East Council uses an Asset Based approach to bring together and build upon our assets (organisations, places/buildings, knowledge and enthusiasm) in our communities. Cheshire East Council will support and engage with communities including the voluntary, community and faith sector and the many active volunteer-based partnerships. This is articulated through the Connected Communities Strategy which covers the period to 2025.

This includes delivery of a new crowdfunding platform, Cheshire East Crowd, with up to £10,000 available to support great community projects in partnership with crowdfunding platform Spacehive. This will enable local people, businesses, the council and other organisations to pledge alongside each other to crowdfunding campaigns that bring your ideas to life.

Neighbourhood Partnerships bring together a range of partners including the Voluntary, Community and Faith (VCF) sector, Police, children's centres, schools, Youth Services, Youth Offending Team, local elected members and businesses. The purpose is to understand local priorities based on local intelligence. We work as a partnership to create local projects that impact on those local priorities. Agencies and local residents work collaboratively to create and tailor projects to suit that community.

Care Communities bring together Health and Social Care professionals to understand local priorities. They provide a range of integrated Health and Social Care services within a community and in primary care settings to best suit local residents and impact on local priorities. There are eight Care Communities across Cheshire East, governed by local clinical leads. Each of our Care Communities serves a population ranging between 30,000 and 50,000 people.

The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) will be undertaken to: understand variation in the current experience of poverty across Cheshire East; to consider likely future needs; to understand current assets to address poverty; identify gaps in provision and assets to address poverty. This work is being led by Cheshire East Council Public Health in collaboration with the wider Council, NHS and VCFSE. The work is overseen by the Cheshire East JSNA Steering Group as part of the 2022/23 work programme.

The Council has worked with the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities to pilot a national approach. Public Health will undertake a needs assessment to understand the health and wellbeing issues facing older people in our rural communities. This will result in recommendations to the Council and its partners on a theme of connectivity (reducing social isolation, accessing services, staying active) with reference to CEC-wide strategies and their implementation in rural areas.

More generally, the Council seeks to create a place that supports health and wellbeing for everyone in Cheshire East, which involves many services throughout the Council. For example, improving health and wellbeing by increasing the number of people who use outdoor space for exercise/health reasons will involve parks, countryside and leisure services alongside public health, external agencies and voluntary sector.

The education directorate will be promoting a strategic training and development programme, which will be launched as from September 2022 for the academic year 22-23. This will play a key role for smaller and rural schools in ensuring that appropriate support is available where the release of staffing is a challenge to attend training and many staff have to hold multiple responsibilities.

The local authority will be taking up the option of establishing a multi academy trust; discussions with our maintained schools including rural schools has been positive. A registration of interest to the Regional Schools Commissioning Team is submitted in 2022 to be part of an initial national pilot for establishing a new trust. Decisions are expected by the end of September 2022 as to whether this option is taken forward.

All rural schools will need to consider an academy trust solution by 2030 as outlined in the 'White paper: Opportunities for All' and therefore school leaders and governing

boards will need to seek the right family of schools to meet their needs going forward.

In 2022, Cheshire East Council was successful in a bid for a share of the government's [Family Hubs Transformation Fund](#). The hubs aim to bring council, health and community services together to provide help to families ensuring they have access to the right support at the right time. Issues such as debt, poor mental health or threat of homelessness can happen to families at any point in a child or young person's life.

Centres will be developed to create the walk-in hubs for parents/carers of children of all ages, to ensure that they can access support across a range of services using existing community venues. Services within the family hub network will also be accessible in a number of other ways including virtual, physical, and via outreach in rural areas.

The Shared Prosperity Fund has a focus on Communities and place. It seeks to strengthen our social fabric and foster a sense of local pride and belonging, through investment in activities that enhance physical, cultural and social ties and amenities. This includes community infrastructure, local green space, and community-led projects. An investment plan is submitted to Government for approval in 2022 and funding will be over a three-year period.

Planning for a green and sustainable place

During the period of this Rural Action Plan important measures will be taken in respect of the Local Plan. The Sites Allocation Policy Document of the current Local Plan Strategy will be adopted, and the review of the Local Plan will commence in advance of adoption for the following period from 2026. In addition, Neighbourhood plans help to identify locally distinct habitats and landscapes which should be subject to specific protection and/or policies that positively manage the impact of local land use decisions. The Council will continue to support local councils in both their preparation and, where they are already adopted, their review.

There are significant changes planned to national planning policy which will need to be reflected in the new Local Plan strategy. In the meantime, national policies related to Biodiversity Net Gain, Local Nature Recovery Strategy (a mandatory element of the Environment Act that will impact on the approach to ELMS), nutrient neutrality regulations, waste strategy and waste and minerals policy will impact on the rural area during the life of this plan.

The Council's own Environment Strategy, Carbon Action Plan commitments related to a commitment that the Council will be carbon-neutral by 2025 and its pledge³⁵ to support the borough being carbon-neutral by 2045 will positively influence plans and projects in the rural area.

³⁵ [UK100 | Network of highly ambitious local government leaders for cleaner, more powerful communities](#)

Visitor & Cultural Economy

Many of Cheshire East's major visitor and cultural assets are in the rural area. The visitor and cultural economy were significantly impacted by the pandemic and the restrictions that were in place. A tourism recovery plan is in place to address significant issues such as the shortage of hospitality staff and cultural recovery projects helped support the arts and heritage organisations. The tourism recovery plan will give way to a new Visitor Economy Strategy from 2023. That strategy will need to address issues such as cost of living impacts, changes in the market due to the pandemic and problems with recruitment and retention of staff. It will also consider opportunities such as the 'staycation' effect, the value of filming, and making the most of recent investment in the sector, such as at Bewilderwood and 'First light', a major new visitor and educational experience that opened at Jodrell Bank World Heritage site in 2022.

The Cheshire East visitor economy forum has been developed into a wider sub-regional network hosted by Marketing Cheshire and supported by the Council. The 'Destination Cheshire' network brings together the visitor attractions and accommodation providers outside Chester in a collaborative grouping of largely rural-based businesses and organisations. This network will be important to the delivery of both the sub-regional Destination Management Plan and Cheshire East's Visitor Economy Strategy.

The Council continues to recognise the importance to the economy, quality of place and community benefit of arts culture and heritage. A new Cultural Framework will guide the Council's priorities for culture, arts and heritage from 2023. There are a number of rural-based cultural organisations and significant events that generate real economic benefit, positive profile for Cheshire East and community wellbeing. These include Rural Touring Arts, Wild Rumpus, Clonter Opera, Nantwich Food and Drink festival, RHS Flower Show, Tatton Park and Bluedot Festival. In addition, Jodrell Bank is Cheshire East's first UNESCO 'World Heritage Site'.

Rural-based businesses

Rural-based business revolves around more than agriculture and land-based industries, whether in the visitor and hospitality sector, creative and digital, science and technology or manufacture. There are a number of significant employers based in rural areas, a large number of SMEs and a high level of home-based working.

The Council's work with business organisations and support for businesses is borough-wide and does not currently have a specific focus on rural-based businesses. However, the Council does recognise some of the specific issues for the rural area. For example, there are a variety of policies in the Site Allocations and Development Policies Document that specifically address or support rural businesses. In addition, some programmes (eg Connecting Cheshire) have projects targeting rural business needs and some strategies (eg Visitor Economy Strategy) have a strong relevance to rural based business.

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) has a specific focus on supporting local business, creating jobs and boosting community cohesion, promoting networking and collaboration, and increasing private sector investment. A 'rural Fund' was announced in September 2022 as a defined top-up to UKSPF in eligible authorities, including Cheshire East. There will also be investment to support people and skills that will follow from 2024-25.

Issues and opportunities for Rural businesses are not specific to the administrative geography of Cheshire East. The Council continues to work with others to help understand rural needs. This includes the sub-regional Rural Strategy Group, set up in 2021 as an advisory body, providing guidance and support to Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester and Warrington Councils in developing and implementing strategies and action plans to support the long-term physical, social and economic development of the rural area.

Rural Action plan 2022/23 – 2025/26

1.	Digital Connectivity: Broadband and Mobile		
	Indicative performance indicators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of households and premises connected (Corporate plan target: 100% superfast broad band access by 2025) Vouchers provided to residents and SMEs 		
	Key actions	Primary responsibilities	Timescale
1.1	Complete the Superfast broadband 30gb rollout and deliver related SME support	CEC Growth & Enterprise	To April 2025
1.2	Continue the rollout of the Airband contract for full fibre broadband	CEC Growth & Enterprise	To April 2025
1.3	BDUK voucher top-up scheme for rural communities with less than 100mb/sec	CEC Growth & Enterprise	2022 - 2025
1.4	Support Project Gigabit – a BDUK operated scheme with scope for input/involvement by local authorities	CEC Growth & Enterprise	2024-25
1.5	Deliver the Cheshire East Digital Strategy	CEC Place Directorate	2022 -24
1.6	Develop a Digital Inclusion Plan	CEC/Health & Wellbeing Board	2023 -24

2.	Access for residents, business and visitors		
	Indicative performance indicators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Percentage of households within 400m of a bus stop served by a scheduled bus service Maintain Public Rights of Way so that at least 80% of the network is classed as 'easy to use' Secure and deliver new and improved public access routes where funding opportunities arise, including through development proposals, where possible, to improve access for residents, business and visitors 		
	Key actions	Primary responsibilities	Timescale
2.1	Adopted Local Transport Plan (LTP) addresses all areas of the borough and includes a local area profile. LTP refresh 2024: Guidance for refresh of the LTP to be published 2022, including application of LTP in rural areas	CEC Strategic Infrastructure and Highways	2022 - 2027/28 2022-2024

2.2	Development of Town Plans for each key service centre and principal towns, which will also encompass the surrounding rural areas	CEC Strategic Infrastructure and Highways	2019-23
2.3	Deliver Go-too pilot demand-responsive bus service in south-western part of Cheshire East funded by DfT Rural Mobility pilot scheme	CEC Strategic Infrastructure and Highways	2022 - 24
2.4	Deliver projects under the Rights of Way Improvement Plan: 2011-2026. Delivery for the period will be in line with the Local Transport Plan and related strategies (such as Green Infrastructure, Cycling Strategy and Local Plan).	CEC Public Rights of Way/ Strategic Infrastructure and Highways	2022-26
2.5	Sustainable travel enhancement programme (STEPS)– annual capital programme of investment in schemes to promote walking or cycling for local travel.	CEC Strategic Infrastructure and Highways/ Public Rights of Way	2022 - ongoing
2.6	HS2a – implementation of mitigation and route changes	CEC Public Rights of Way/ Strategic Infrastructure and Highways	2022 - 26
2.7	Implement PROW changes and improvements related to strategic road schemes impacting on the rural area, including Middlewich bypass, Poynton relief road, A500 and SEMMMS	CEC Public Rights of Way/ Strategic Infrastructure and Highways	2022 - 26
2.8	Extend provision of EV charging points to CEC car parks in rural areas as part of LEVI (local electric vehicle infrastructure fund) programme	CEC Strategic Infrastructure and Highways	2023 - 26
2.9	Active travel plans to be developed in partnership with major rural employers to provide better access and reduce car dependency. Council to recruit a dedicated Active Travel officer to lead this work.	CEC Strategic Infrastructure and Highways	2022 -25

3.	Rural Housing		
	Indicative performance indicators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Needs Surveys completed • Increase in engagement with parish councils, community groups & Neighbourhood Planning groups • Successful delivery of a housing scheme in a rural area or rural allocation site via the CEC Housing Development Framework • Adoption and implementation of a revised Housing Strategy in 2023 		
	Key actions	Primary responsibilities	Timescale
3.1	Exploring opportunities to provide affordable housing to enable local residents to remain living within their communities by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contacting and working with rural communities who have identified a need for affordable housing within their Neighbourhood plans • Undertake Housing Needs Surveys across our rural parishes • Continue to explore opportunities to develop rural exception sites. • Explore opportunities for Community Led Housing Projects 	CEC Strategic Housing & Strategic Planning/ Parish Councils.	2022-26 2022 -26 2022-26 2022-26
3.2	Promote and deliver sites within rural areas, via the CEC Housing Development Framework, which will deliver a mix of housing types and tenures, including affordable housing	CEC Strategic Housing	2024/25
3.3	Develop, adopt and implement a new Housing Strategy for the borough	CEC Strategic Housing	2023
3.4	Put in place up-to-date planning policy and guidance to support the provision of rural housing, including for essential rural workers, primarily through the Site Allocations and Development Policies Document	CEC Strategic Planning	2022-26
3.5	Secure grant funding to retrofit off-gas homes.	CEC Strategic Housing	2023-25

4.	Strong, supportive rural places and communities		
	Indicative performance indicators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor through the Public Health Commissioned services scorecard • Annual review of the 'tartan' rug which will provide an overview of health and wellbeing in all wards including rural. • Monitor through uptake of the commissions to support resilience and independence eg carers hub, early help framework, emotionally healthy child and young people programme and CVS contracts. 		
	Key actions	CEC Primary responsibilities and other contributors	Timescale
4.1	Support local communities to identify assets that are important to them, and promote the Register of Assets of Community Value as a means of recognising their value and potential for sale to community groups	CEC Communities, Legal, & Assets; Parish Councils; VCFS	2021 -25
4.2	Deliver the connected Communities Strategy to improve health and wellbeing in the Borough by building on the distinctive strengths and characteristics of the towns and villages within Cheshire East, by encouraging and supporting Partnerships to help meet these outcomes.	CEC Communities Team & Public Health Team, Neighbourhood Partnerships, Parish Councils, VCFS	2021 -25
4.3	Develop and support Connected Communities neighbourhood partnerships covering rural areas, which bring local people together to address the needs of the community and work collaboratively to improve their shared offer.	CEC Communities Team, Parish Councils, VCF Sector Groups, Police, Health, CFRS,	2021 -25
4.4	Improving the mental health and wellbeing of people, through assessing the levels of loneliness and social isolation in rural areas across the borough, the carers strategy, and 'living well for longer'.	CEC Public Health, CCG's, NHS, CEC, Police, CFRS, Healthwatch, VCFS	2023-24
4.5	Working with the CE Wellbeing Network co-ordinates health and wellbeing campaigns, enable more people to Live Well for Longer through collaborative health and wellbeing campaigns that involve rural places	CEC Public Health, CCG's, NHS, CEC, Police, CFRS, Healthwatch, VCFS	2022-26

4.6	To promote strategic training and development and encourage rural schools to access the programme	CEC Education /Schools	2022-25
4.7	(Subject to a successful bid) to establish a Multi-Academy Trust as part of a national pilot, giving rural schools the opportunity to consider the academy trust solution	CEC Education /Schools	2022 -30
4.8	Manage the Shared Prosperity Fund with a focus on support for Communities and place.	CEC Place Directorate	2022 -25
4.9	As part of the Council's Carbon Action Plan and net zero the Council will work with the Boroughs' schools, academies, colleges and associated partners: to promote resources available for young people to understand and engage with measures to address Climate Change; and to undertake tree planting schemes as part of the natural capital programme	CEC Education/ CEC Place Directorate /Schools/Mersey Forest/Cheshire Wildlife Trust	2022 -26
4.10	Promote Crowd Funding through 'Cheshire East Crowd', with up to £10,000 available to support community projects.	CEC Communities Team	2021-24
4.11	Maintain 'social value' as part of the CEC procurement strategy	CEC procurement	2022 ongoing
4.12	Undertake a needs assessment to understand the health and wellbeing issues facing older people in our rural communities, with recommendations to the Council and its partners on a theme of connectivity	CEC Public Health VCFSE OHID Parish Councils Residents	2023 - 2024
4.13	Undertake the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)	CEC Public Health/NHS/ VCFSE	2022/23
4.14	Address rural needs as part of the 'Winter wellbeing group' working with the community and voluntary sector	CEC Communities Team/Public Health/Winter wellbeing group	2022 - 26
4.15	Develop Family Hubs in line with government expectations and criteria.	CEC Children's Services Health, VCS	2022- 24

5.	Planning for a green and sustainable place		
	Indicative performance indicators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Detailed planning policies in place to protect and enhance the quality of rural environment Climate change targets on track 		
	Key actions	CEC Primary responsibilities and other contributors	Timescale
5.1	Conserve and manage the natural features and biodiversity of the Council's Countryside assets and Tatton Park for present and future generations	CEC Rural & Cultural Economy	2022-26
5.2	Further, detailed planning policies to be put in place to protect and enhance the quality of rural environment (landscape, heritage and biodiversity) through the Site Allocations and Development Policies Document	CEC Strategic Planning	2022/23
5.3	Continue to support local councils in putting in place Neighbourhood Development Plans that help shape their areas and enhance quality of life in rural communities.	CEC Strategic Planning	2022-26
5.4	Support communities to review their adopted Neighbourhood plans to ensure they continue to align with and inform the boroughs wider rural strategy, ensuring new opportunities are captured.	CEC Strategic Planning	2022 -26
5.5	Adoption of a Minerals and Waste Local Plan to ensure the proper planning and management of the Borough's natural resources	CEC Strategic Planning	2023/24
5.6	Review and amend supplementary planning guidance to ensure that the design and appearance of rural areas is maintained.	CEC Strategic Planning	2022- 24
5.7	Adopt supplementary planning guidance for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)	CEC Strategic Planning	2022/23

5.8	Seek continued improvement in standards of estate management, maintenance, husbandry, good environmental practice and stewardship of the Council's farm estate whilst providing opportunities to suitably qualified persons to enter agriculture	CEC Growth & Enterprise, Cheshire Farms Shared service	2022 -26
5.9	During the period, the Council will review its farms strategy, agricultural land-holdings within the farm estate and on-going work with farm tenants to: - (1.1) Optimise Opportunities to improve soil and livestock management practices. (1.2) Identify appropriate opportunities for tree and hedge planting or mossland restoration within farm holdings to improve natural capital benefits and nature-based approaches to Carbon sequestration. (1.3) Review the terms and conditions of all new tenancies on Cheshire East Farms, as they become available, to facilitate (1.1) and (1.2) above. (1.4) Notwithstanding the above, maintain a viable farm estate to provide opportunities for entry-level access to farming	CEC Growth & Enterprise, Cheshire Farms Shared service	2022 - 26
5.10	Implement the Environment Strategy (2019) to provide the Council with a framework to help protect and enhance the environment and improve residents' quality of life, related to the natural and built environment of the borough and addressing transport, energy & carbon, waste and minerals.	CEC Place Directorate	2022 - 26
5.11	Deliver the Council's Carbon Action Plan targets including decarbonising the delivery of Council services in rural areas, increase local renewable energy and sequester carbon through nature-based solutions.	CEC Place Directorate	2025/26
5.12	Develop proposals for the Council and the role of our rural areas in supporting delivery of net-zero for the borough by 2045 (UK100 pledge)	CEC Place Directorate	2023
5.13	In support of its Carbon Action Plan, boroughwide targets and biodiversity	CEC Place Directorate	2022 - 26

	policies, the Council will review, and implement where appropriate, opportunities for improving natural capital, including tree and woodland cover, peatland restoration and other nature-based solutions on Council-owned land, and encouraging/facilitating such investment on other appropriate land		
5.14	Support the Council's environmental and carbon action plan objectives as part of the Mersey Forest Partnership, in collaboration with Cheshire Wildlife Trust, and working with the Local Nature Partnership,	CEC Place Directorate/ Mersey Forest/ CWT/LNP	2022 -26
5.15	Work with the Distribution Network Operators and others to strengthen and diversify the energy network in rural areas to enable the transition to net-zero and tackle fuel poverty.	CEC Place Directorate	2022 - 26

6.0	Visitor & Cultural Economy		
	Indicative performance indicators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Value of the Cheshire East visitor economy returns to pre-pandemic levels by 2025 		
	Key actions	CEC Primary responsibilities and other contributors	Timescale
6.1	Implement (September 2021) Tourism Recovery Plan including deliver with partners of the hospitality recruitment and retention programme	CEC Rural & Cultural Economy, Marketing Cheshire, Job Centre +/Springboard	2022/23
6.2	Visitor Economy Strategy 2023-28 includes a focus on developing a distinctive rural tourism offer supported by website and social media activity	CEC Rural & Cultural Economy, Marketing Cheshire	2023-28
6.3	Facilitate a 'Destination Cheshire' network support for the delivery of visitor economy strategy	CEC Rural & Cultural Economy, Marketing Cheshire, other partners	2023-28

6.4	Promote an annual Cheshire Day To promote the best of Cheshire as part of destination marketing	CEC Rural & Cultural Economy, Marketing Cheshire	2023 onwards
6.5	Promotion of Sandstone and Gritstone trails and opportunities to improve visitor infrastructure	CEC Rural & Cultural Economy, CWaC	2022 - 26
6.6	Promotion and support for rural attractions and events that generate tourism, economic and cultural benefits to Cheshire East	CEC Rural & Cultural Economy, Marketing Cheshire	2022 - 26
6.7	Support and promote through the Cultural Framework activity and organisations that address CEC priorities and benefit the rural area	CEC Rural & Cultural Economy	2023-27
6.8	Manage Tatton Park as one of the region's foremost tourism, cultural and heritage assets.	CEC Rural & Cultural Economy	2022 -26
6.9	Continue delivery of Rural Touring Network to support cultural priorities as part of Cultural framework.	CEC Rural & Cultural Economy, CWaC	2022 onwards
6.10	Liaison and collaborative working with Peak district to identify tourism and other opportunities of joint interest	CEC Rural & Cultural Economy /PDNP	2022 -26
6.11	Put in place up-to-date planning policy to maintain and enhance the visitor economy in the rural area through the Site Allocations and Development Policies Document and Local Plan review	CEC Strategic Planning	2022-26

7.	Rural Based Businesses		
	Indicative performance indicators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor through 'Tractivity' – CEC business activity database 		
	Key actions	CEC Primary responsibilities and other contributors	Timescale
7.1	Seek to maintain and grow the diverse economy in rural areas, including key sectors, working with businesses and others (eg Rural Strategy Group)	CEC Growth & Enterprise, CWaC, LEP, RSG	2022-26

7.2	Seek to maximise government support and finance available.	CEC Growth & Enterprise, Rural & Cultural Economy/LEP	2022-26
7.3	Manage the Shared Prosperity Fund: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting local business • People & Skills 	CEC Growth & Enterprise	2022-25 2024/25
7.4	Deliver a positive planning policy framework to support a prosperous rural economy including sustainable rural tourism to be reinforced through the Site Allocations and Development Policies Document	CEC Strategic Planning	2022/23

Appendix 1: Issues for further consideration during the period 2022/23-2025/26

The action plan identifies those things that the Council is doing or planning to do, which are relevant to or may impact on the rural area of the borough over the period of this Rural Action Plan. It is recognised that there will be other issues that may affect the rural area for which plans are not in place or are pending. Therefore, while it is not intended to be a comprehensive list, this appendix identifies a number of key issues that have been identified during the plan development, which may need further consideration over the life of the plan. For example, there may be a need to maintain awareness of potential impacts or to determine whether the Council has a role (and if so, what). There will also be situations where plans are still in preparation, where information is not yet available to allow the development of detailed plans or where further research and other work is necessary to inform future plans beyond the life of this plan.

Energy vulnerabilities:³⁶ ³⁷With some rural communities being off-grid and therefore more reliant on fossil fuels such as liquified petroleum gas (LPG) and oil, there is a potential double impact of transition towards net zero and current energy price inflation.

Government plans are to stop the installation of gas boilers in new homes by 2025 and new gas boilers by 2035. Instead, low-carbon heating systems (such as heat pumps) would take their place. In addition, there are proposals to phase out sales of new petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2030 to accelerate the transition to electric vehicles and investing in grants to help buy cars and charge point infrastructure. The high costs of transition to alternative energy sources along with the inefficiencies of older building stock and the current lack of EV charging infrastructure, combine to impact disproportionately on rural areas, with individuals and businesses facing significant costs if prices do not come down significantly.

Energy costs can also be higher in rural areas because of the car dependency which will be reflected in higher fuel or charging costs, although some of the impacts may be mitigated by growing trends towards remote working.

There is a need to strengthen and diversify the energy network in rural areas to enable the transition to net-zero and tackle fuel poverty. Engagement with Distribution Network Operators and others may yet bring forward other solutions relevant to the rural area including AD/Biogas, solar and heat networks, which may play their part.

Agricultural transition and the environment: The Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) mandated by the Environment Act, presents an opportunity for a cohesive and locally appropriate approach to nature recovery being delivered across the UK. To ensure this approach is based on valid evidence the natural capital assessments and mapping that will lie behind it must be maintained, kept updated and made

³⁶ <https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/rural-lens-review-heat-and-buildings-strategy>
<https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/net-zero-strategy-rural-lens>
<https://rsnonline.org.uk/through-a-rural-lens-sustainable-warmth>

³⁷ NICRE Research Report No 1 April 2021 Rural SMEs and the net zero agenda.pdf (ncl.ac.uk)

available. Among other things, the LNRS could inform local priorities for Environmental Land Management schemes (ELMS). ELMS, which will be important to the viability of some rural businesses, will combine a number of schemes to reward farmers and landowners for 'public goods' which can assist nature recovery and the approach to achieving Net Zero.

Once Government finalises its approach to ELMS the Council will be able to update its strategy for the Farms Estate. The transition brought about by ELMS and Net Zero policies has the potential to deliver significant land use change. It will be important for the Council to gain an understanding of the potential implications for the environment, food production and communities of such changes and monitor their effects to inform its own policies going forward. Any borough wide Net Zero strategy, must consider how agriculture and other rural land use can deliver multiple functions including CO2 reduction, sequestering carbon, adapting to climate change, biodiversity, biomass production, food security, landscape and wider environmental goals.

While specific plans are yet to come forward, a network of organisations, including CEC, National Trust, Environment Agency, Mersey Forest, Natural England and private landowners, has started to focus on the Bollin catchment as having potential landscape-scale opportunities to benefit the environment and local communities in an area that runs from Macclesfield to the border with Trafford. Collaborative working is identifying potential projects, some of which may come to fruition during the lifetime of this plan, but which now require feasibility work to identify specific opportunities and investable solutions.

Investment in climate resilience: Despite moves towards Net Zero, climate change is already with us. This is already impacting in rural areas, with issues such as flood-risk, changing habitats, impacts on health from climate and fuel poverty, and physical damage to public rights of way and countryside assets. As well as a focus on carbon reduction and sequestration there is therefore a need and opportunity to consider investment in resilience rather than response and repair. Apart from consideration of how this may affect council assets and services, this also presents an issue for consideration through the planning process. There is also an opportunity to consider new or alternative solutions to problems, developing approaches with multiple benefits. For example, nature-based solutions to reducing downstream flood-risk can not only be cost-effective but will also have benefits for landscape and wildlife.

Rural based business:³⁸ Rural-based business revolves around more than agriculture and land-based industries. They are important and have their own challenges, but rural enterprises in general often require targeted and tailored consideration to address specific challenges arising from their distance from support services, markets and business networks. Practical issues related to staff recruitment and skills, accessibility, and housing can impact on many rural-based business, whether in the hospitality sector, creative and digital, science and technology or agriculture. There is a continued need for engagement with

³⁸ <https://www.parliament.co.uk/APPG/rural-business-and-the-rural-powerhouse>
Parliamentary group launches major report into rural economy • CLA

businesses, whether large or small, to understand the challenges and opportunities that are specific to the rural business community. Economic strategy should recognise the importance of rural-based business to the Cheshire East economy and ensure that there is an integrated, resourced, rural-proofed approach to addressing, the opportunities available across the Cheshire East economy and access to any relevant funding streams. However, economic strategy for rural-based business must also prioritise the practical issues that businesses in rural areas face, including accessibility, availability of staff, housing and digital connectivity.

The availability of affordable housing is a potential constraint to growth with impacts both on businesses and rural communities. The delivery of the right type and size of housing in the right area is vitally important for rural areas. Even with appropriate policies in place this will require increasing engagement with local community groups, parish councils and other organisations.

In a report by the NFU³⁹, they identified, access to mobile and broadband coverage as being the key to business growth. The NFU's Digital Technology Survey found that only 40 per cent of members believe their broadband to be sufficient for current business needs. Reliable coverage and connections will benefit farming, British food production, and wider rural businesses. Government funded schemes do exist, but the needs of harder to reach premises are not always addressed despite the intention to do so. Some areas have not been able to award contracts due to lack of supplier interest so there is a risk of delays or changes, while even if awarded there is no guarantee of the coverage that is actually deployed via these contracts. For example, Project Gigabit offers a lot of promise, but does not specifically target sub 30mbps premises. Rather, it will target funding on sub-gigabit premises, with the majority of work invested in upgrading. Therefore, given the scale the sub 30mbps issues in some rural areas, its impact for rural businesses may be more limited than the aspiration.

Regarding other types of funding programmes, evidence from previous large-scale area-wide rural development programmes (such as LEADER), demonstrates that success requires funding streams designed and delivered to ensure equitable access for rural as well as for urban places and economies. The LEADER approach, (see appendix 1 case studies in [Cheshire East Rural Action Plan](#), 2018-22) was successful in both job creation and leverage of additional investment. The approach taken by the Cheshire local authorities offers a model for future rural funding streams, subject to capacity and resources being available.

Shared Prosperity and 'levelling-up': The Government's levelling-up agenda (February 2022) brings together a number of policy strands and funding initiatives that may have opportunities or impacts for rural areas. The government is also developing deals for the devolution of powers and funding with all areas across England through 'County Deals'. Any approach to 'levelling-up' will need to take

³⁹ 'The rural economy and levelling-up'; NFU/Onward, May 2021. and www.nfuonline.com/cross-sector/rural-affairs/broadband-and-mobile/broadband-must-read/2020-nfu-digital-survey-results-read-the-full-report

account of the rural-urban mix of the area, whether considering Cheshire East or the wider sub-region and be able to respond to evolving Government Policy.

The Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) has a focus on 'Community and Place', 'Supporting Local Business' and 'People and Skills' and will help to fund projects that meet the Fund's criteria over the period to 2025. Part of the Government's 'levelling up' agenda, this also gives the Council the opportunity to consider how the projects and priorities can address some of the 'levelling up' opportunities where there are disparities within an area between rural and urban. A 'Rural fund' was announced in September 2022 as a top-up to UKSPF with an additional capital allocation as a successor to EU funding from LEADER and the Growth Programme. The fund will be for 2023/24 and 24/25 for 'local business' and 'communities and place' projects.

A briefing paper by NICRE⁴⁰ suggested that the Government's ambition to Share Prosperity or Build Back Better is the opportunity to visibly embrace the 20–25% of population, output and business stock hosted in England's rural areas. For Cheshire East, there will be rural representation on the UKSPF Local Partnership Group that will guide its implementation, but at the time of writing this plan, approval by Government of the UKSPF investment plan and preparation of a 'Rural Fund' addendum are awaited.

Access and Transport

Once plans are finalised, and subject to the outcome of the petitioning process, the Council will bring forward plans for the implementation of mitigation and route changes related to HS2b.

New government guidance from the Department of Transport will be available for Local transport Plans (LTP) from the end of 2022. This will apply to the whole borough and is expected to major on Decarbonising travel in accordance with national strategies. This is likely to re-introduce a performance-related funding regime so CEC has to decide where it can have greatest impact from its LTP investment.

CEC is undertaking a thorough review of home-to-school transport provision, with a view to improving sustainability for both parents and the Council. It is expected that the review will be completed in phases over the next 2-3 years. Community transport options will be investigated as part of a review of rural bus services, planned to be complete by April 23. Options will depend on availability of funding, as to date, CEC has not received any Government bus improvement funding.

Given the climate change imperative, there is a need to consider sustainable travel options for visitor attractions and major tourism businesses, many of which are in the rural area and can only be visited by car. EV charging infrastructure in rural areas and at attractions would assist this transition, while other options such as electric bikes at rail stations could be considered. There may also be links to Community Rail

⁴⁰ [NICRE Briefing Paper No 2 November 2021 The strategic case for equitable recognition of rural economies in Levelling Up policies.pdf \(ncl.ac.uk\)](#)

Partnerships, eg. Mid Cheshire Line CRP run a successful “Great Days out by Train” promotional campaign.

Research and intelligence: As the economy in rural areas is of importance to Cheshire East as a borough, there is an ongoing need to support future work with up to date and accessible local economic data, research, intelligence and analysis (including place and sector-based trends and data, visitor economy, events, SMEs, home working, investment, business needs, and mobile/digital connectivity).