



New local plan for Cheshire East

Transport and infrastructure topic paper (draft)

March 2024

Open

Fair

Green

Front cover images (clockwise from top-left):

- Crewe Market Hall and Municipal Buildings
- Arclid north plant site and lake (image supplied by Bathgate Silica Sand Ltd)
- Jodrell Bank Observatory
- Lamberts Lane Bridge, Congleton
- Tabley Park, Northwich Road, Knutsford

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1 Introduction

1.1 This topic paper provides further information to support the 'Transport and infrastructure' section in the new local plan issues paper. For ease of reading, it uses the same headings that are set out in the issues paper for this topic.

1.2 An effective transport and infrastructure network supports the sustainable functioning of existing communities and helps enable opportunities for further growth within the borough. Transport connects people to jobs, community services and facilities, recreation, friends and family.

1.3 The planning system can be used to help improve accessibility and implement national objectives around reducing car use and encouraging more sustainable modes of travel such as walking, cycling or public transport. The local plan represents one element of a wider suite of transport policies and strategies that are intended to operate in a co-ordinated way at the national, regional, borough-wide and local level including:

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)¹
- Department for Transport (DfT) Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Strategy²
- DfT Transport Decarbonisation Plan³
- Network Rail Strategic Business Plan⁴
- Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership Transport Strategy⁵
- Transport for the North Strategic Transport Plan⁶
- CEC Local Transport Plan⁷
- CEC Rights of Way Improvement Plan⁸
- CEC Cycling Strategy⁹
- CEC Bus Service Improvement Plan¹⁰
- Individual Cheshire East Neighbourhood Plans¹¹
- Individual Cheshire East Local Transport Development Plans⁷

1.4 Other forms of infrastructure are also important to the wider well being of society such as the suitable provision of utilities (water, gas and electricity), telecommunications networks, green space networks (parks, gardens, woodlands, green corridors and so on), and social and community facilities.

1 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>

2 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cycling-and-walking-investment-strategy>

3 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transport-decarbonisation-plan>

4 <https://www.networkrail.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/England-and-Wales-CP7-Strategic-Business-Plan.pdf>

5 https://www.warrington.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2019-10/appendix_11_-_cheshire_and_warrington_transport_strategy.pdf

6 <https://transportforthenorth.com/our-north/strategic-transport-plan/>

7 https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/public_transport/local_transport_plan/local_transport_plan.aspx

8 https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/leisure_culture_and_tourism/public_rights_of_way/improving_public_rights_of_way.aspx

9 https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/highways_and_roads/cycling_in_cheshire_east/cycling_in_cheshire_east.aspx

10 https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/public_transport/transport_strategies.aspx

11 <https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/planning/neighbourhood-plans/neighbourhood-planning.aspx>

1.5 The identification and implementation of the infrastructure improvements required to support growth in the borough is a fundamental requirement for the successful development of a new local plan. The council will prepare a new Infrastructure Delivery Plan to provide these details and help it secure developer contributions from planning applications in the future.

2 Active travel

2.1 Active travel refers to modes of travel that involve a level of activity and is considered the least carbon intensive way to travel. The term refers mostly to walking and cycling but can also mean other forms of wheeled activity such as trips made by wheelchair, mobility scooters, adapted cycles, e-cycles, scooters and cycle share schemes. These types or modes of travel can provide health and economic benefits, through improved physical/mental well-being as well as decreased congestion and air/noise pollution. Therefore, the aim is to make cycling and walking the natural choice for shorter journeys, and for it to also form part of larger journeys. Priority will be given to routes that serve a dual purpose as providing everyday walking and cycling links for commuters and residents, as well as providing recreational routes or trails for leisure purposes.

2.2 Results from the 2021 National Travel Survey (England)¹² provide a breakdown of the number of trips made and distance travelled by modal share. This shows that the car was the most popular mode of travel, making up 59% of all trips in 2021 and 80% of all miles travelled. This can be compared with walking that made up 31% of all trips and 5% of all miles travelled, and cycling that made up 2% of all trips and 1% of all miles travelled.

Walking

2.3 Cheshire East benefits from an extensive public rights of way network with generally good provision for walkers. Walking policies are principally delivered through the implementation plans associated with the council's Rights of Way Improvement Plan⁸ and Local Transport Plan.⁷ Overall, these identify that the pedestrian network would benefit from:

- Continued highway footpath and public rights of way path improvement and surface maintenance.
- Removing access barriers for users with reduced mobility.
- Linked existing pieces of infrastructure and closing gaps in the network.
- Improving rural provision, particularly to and from trip attractors and areas of interest.
- Providing safe pedestrian crossing points.

Cycling

2.4 Cheshire East's relatively compact settlements and mostly flat terrain lends itself to cycling as a low-cost, healthy, energy efficient and enjoyable way of travelling. The council is committed to enabling more people to cycle in safety, more often and with confidence for everyday and leisure journeys. Generally, cycling to work is more prevalent in built-up rather than rural areas, reflecting shorter distances and existing infrastructure in the main settlements of the borough.

12 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1101636/nts-2021-factsheet.pdf

2.5 The council adopted a Cycling Strategy¹³ in 2017 that sets out guidelines for cycling investment between 2017 and 2027. The main targets identified are to double the number of people cycling, improve public perception of cycling and to increase leisure cycling within the borough. A perceived lack of safety and a fragmented cycling network are consistently identified as the main barriers to higher levels of cycling. Therefore, building a cohesive and high quality network of cycle lanes and paths, and ensuring these connect with major trip destinations, is key to making cycling more attractive in Cheshire East. Delivering this cycle-friendly environment will need cycling infrastructure that is safe, attractive, cohesive, direct and adaptable. The strategy supports proposals that deliver a network of key routes for cycling that link with existing local routes in order to connect residents and visitors to jobs, training, education, services and leisure opportunities.

2.6 The Cycling Strategy proposes the development of Town Cycling Plans with local cycling groups. These will identify existing routes and propose new local cycle routes for adoption within Neighbourhood Plans. They will also provide guidance on future planning and infrastructure proposals within these towns.

2.7 The council does not currently have a specific planning policy on active travel but this issue is incorporated within wider transport policies of the adopted local plans. For example, Policy CO 1 'Sustainable Travel and Transport' in the LPS expects development to:

- Reduce the need to travel, including by ensuring development gives priority to walking, cycling and public transport within the design.
- Improve pedestrian and cycling facilities so that walking and cycling is attractive for shorter journeys.
- Improve public transport integration, facilities, capacity, service levels, access for all users and reliability.
- Improve public transport service levels.
- Improve and develop appropriate road, rail and water freight transport routes and associated intermodal freight transport facilities in order to assist in the sustainable and efficient movement of goods.

2.8 Other adopted policies include active travel within business related developments through LPS Policy CO 2 'Enabling Business Growth Through Transport Infrastructure', within major development proposals through LPS Policy CO 4 'Travel Plans and Transport Assessments' and through SADPD Policy INF 1 'Cycleways, bridleways and footpaths'.

13 <https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/pdf/highways/cycling/cheshire-east-council-cycling-strategy-march-2017.pdf>

3 Public transport

3.1 Increasing the use of travel by bus or rail will also help reduce car use and deliver wider goals around sustainability. The 2021 National Travel Survey (England) showed that bus use made up 3% of all trips and 3% of all miles travelled, while rail use made up 1% of all trips and 7% of all miles travelled. However, the 2021 census shows that car use in Cheshire East is significantly higher than the national and regional average. For example, some 19,800 residents (10.3% of the borough's working residents) travel at least 20km to work compared with 7.3% in the North West and 8.4% in England and Wales. This reflects the size and geographical spread of settlements in the borough, the distance to main employment centres and the higher costs associated with delivering public transport in a rural setting.

Bus

3.2 Bus services in Cheshire East provide access between and within the major settlements, as well as provide an important role in connecting users to local services including employment, schools and recreation. The Cheshire East bus network comprises a mix of commercial and supported services with Cheshire East Council responsible for coordination and information provision.

3.3 The council's current Local Transport Plan reports that:

"In 2016/17, there were approximately 4.5 bus passenger journeys per resident across the Borough which is reflective of a figure where patronage has declined in recent years. Bus patronage declined by 22% between 2009/10 and 2016, with Cheshire East within the bottom five Local Authorities for the lowest number of passenger journeys per head (12 passenger journeys per head).

Cheshire East therefore has amongst the lowest number of trips per head of resident population in England. Usage of the network is also characterised by a high proportion of trips undertaken by concessionary pass holders – equating to 49% of all trips in 2016/17, the second highest proportion in the country.

The decline in bus patronage causes commercial services provided by private operators to be less viable and thereby places further pressure on the Council's budget for supported/subsidised services."

3.4 The council published its first five year Bus Service Improvement Plan¹⁴ (BSIP) on 31 October 2021 with the aim of improving the speed, reliability and quality of service. It identifies three phases of delivery focusing on stabilising the bus network, making quality improvements, and enabling network growth. The council has set out how it intends to deliver these aims in association with bus operators through its Enhanced Partnership Scheme.¹⁵ The proposals identified represent what is considered achievable without any additional funding from central government.

14 <https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/pdf/public-transport/bsip/cheshire-east-bsip-2021.pdf>

15 <https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/pdf/public-transport/bsip/cheshire-east-enhanced-partnership-scheme-2022.pdf>

3.5 The council recognises that traditional, scheduled bus services may not be feasible in all areas of the borough or meet the needs of all residents and communities in Cheshire East. Where bus services are not the best solution, it may be advantageous to consider 'demand responsive' flexible transport solutions. Community transport can offer an alternative mode of transport, particularly in more rural areas. A number of such schemes are in place across the borough including dedicated parish minibuses and community car schemes.

Rail

3.6 The Cheshire East area plays an important role in rail connectivity, with Crewe providing a nationally significant hub for connections on the West Coast Mainline with London, Birmingham, North Wales, Manchester, Liverpool and Scotland. The borough also possesses access to inter-city services from Macclesfield and Wilmslow, as well as a number of inter-urban connections that are essential to the ongoing vitality of the economy. The borough has 22 stations on the national rail network. The number of passengers carried by rail services has grown strongly since privatisation in 1994, but this has been limited in certain instances in Cheshire East by the availability and capacity of services with some stations only providing an hourly service. The recent decision to cancel HS2 north of Birmingham (to Crewe and Manchester) means that the potential to free up capacity for more local services has been greatly reduced.

3.7 The railway line through Middlewich is currently used solely for freight. Re-opening the Northwich to Sandbach line for passenger services would increase travel choice, improve accessibility and enable sustainable growth in Middlewich. An area of land at Brooks Lane has been safeguarded, through the Local Plan Strategy¹⁶ and an accompanying supplementary planning document,¹⁷ to enable the potential delivery of a new Middlewich station. Work has been undertaken to consider the feasibility of this proposal. In addition, the section of the railway between Crewe and Alsager requires investment; double tracking this section of railway would enable service increases on the Crewe to Derby line.

Public transport information, ticketing and facilities

3.8 Technology and innovation are becoming more prominent in terms of the role they play in the transport network, and this is likely to increase. Transport for the North (TfN) have been working in partnership with operators and transport authorities to deliver an integrated ticketing scheme that will make it easier for passengers to travel seamlessly using a payment method of their choice.

3.9 A lack of integration between transport services has been identified as a significant barrier to greater use of bus and rail services, causing significant increases in journey time and discouraging multi-modal travel. Initiatives to overcome this have been shown to have the potential to increase the appeal of travel by public transport and provide an attractive alternative to the private car.

16 https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/planning/spatial-planning/cheshire_east_local_plan/local-plan-strategy/local_plan_strategy.aspx

17 <https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/pdf/planning/spatial-planning/bldf-spd-final-draft.pdf>

3.10 The provision of additional information at bus stops/stations and railway stations increases the likelihood of the use of public transport and interchange, as do improved interchange facilities.

4 Car parking

4.1 Parking provision in the borough supports accessibility for residents, businesses, shoppers, workers and commuters. Parking provision has the potential to impact on surrounding areas both negatively and positively. When parking is well managed it can support thriving businesses, provide access to services and enable active social lives; but when not well managed parking can encourage car travel to areas which suffer unduly from congestion as well as causing other environmental and social issues.

4.2 The council has published a High Level Parking Strategy¹⁸ (2017) for Cheshire East which seeks to manage on and off street parking (to positively affect the capacity and flow of the road network), whilst encouraging more sustainable travel patterns including walking, cycling and public transport where these effective alternatives are available. It also aims to:

- Sustain and enhance the vitality of our town centres.
- Provide for the parking needs of people with disabilities and parents/carers with young children.
- Balance the parking demands of local residents, shops and businesses and visitors, shoppers, workers and commuters.

4.3 The parking standards that the council currently applies to new development is set out in Appendix C of the Local Plan Strategy.¹⁹ These represent minimum standards for residential development and recommended levels for other uses. Parking provision also takes account of:

- The availability and cost of parking spaces on site and close by.
- How regular and frequent public transport is.
- How easy it is to access a site by safe walking and cycling routes.
- The operational needs of proposed developments.
- The relationship between different land uses, such as how close housing is to employment, shops and leisure use.

4.4 Further information on car parking can be found on the council's website²⁰, particularly within the council's Local Transport Plan and Local Transport Development Plans.

18 <https://moderngov.cheshireeast.gov.uk/documents/s62470/Local%20Transport%20Plan%20Refresh%20-%20app%204a.pdf>

19 https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/planning/spatial-planning/cheshire_east_local_plan/local-plan-strategy/local_plan_strategy.aspx

20 <https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/car-parks-and-parking/car-parks-and-parking.aspx>

5 Developer contributions

5.1 Developer contributions are sought by the council through the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and through legal agreements via Section 106 planning obligations and S278 highway agreements.

CIL

5.2 The CIL is a planning charge that local authorities can use to support the development of their area. It is a set charge on most new development based on the gross internal floorspace of buildings and is used to help fund the infrastructure needed to address the cumulative impact of development across the borough. It came into force across England and Wales in April 2010 and has been charged in Cheshire East since 1 March 2019. Only two types of development in Cheshire East are liable to pay a CIL charge. These are housing (excluding affordable housing and apartments) and retail development at two specific locations (the Crewe Grand Junction and Handforth Dean retail parks). All other development has a zero CIL charge for economic viability reasons. The council's CIL charging schedule sets out its CIL charging rates. Further details on these rates and CIL more generally can be found on cheshireeast.gov.uk.²¹

S106 Obligations

5.3 Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 enables a local planning authority to enter into a negotiated agreement or planning obligation to mitigate the impact of a specific development and make it acceptable in planning terms. The planning obligation might, for example, require the provision or contribution to a new or improved road, school, health facility or local green infrastructure. Local planning authorities can also seek planning obligations to secure a proportion of affordable housing from residential developments. In some instances, section 106 planning obligations may require payments to be made to parish councils. Further details on planning obligations can be found on the government's website.²²

5.4 Our yearly Infrastructure Funding Statement²³ summarises information on CIL and other developer contributions, as well as the projects funded and those the council is seeking to fund.

21 https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/planning/spatial-planning/cheshire_east_local_plan/community-infrastructure-levy/community-infrastructure-levy.aspx

22 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/planning-obligations>

23 <https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/planning/spatial-planning/infrastructure-funding-developer-contributions.aspx>

6 Infrastructure

6.1 The term ‘infrastructure’ is broadly used for planning purposes to cover all the service requirements that are needed to make places function efficiently and effectively, thereby helping to create sustainable communities. It is commonly split into categories such as physical, social/community and environmental infrastructure.

6.2 Physical infrastructure generally refers to the transport and telecommunication networks, the supply of utilities (water, gas and electricity), the management of waste or flood risk, the treatment of waste water and the public realm (street lighting, seating, planting and so on). Social/community infrastructure includes facilities relating to health, education, social care, leisure and culture, as well as places of worship and community centres. Environmental infrastructure refers to the network of green and blue corridors within and between settlements. This can include parks, gardens, woodlands, countryside, rivers, lakes and canals.

6.3 In preparing a new local plan, it is important for the council understands what new and improved infrastructure is required to overcome existing issues and help accommodate any proposals for growth in the borough. To achieve this the council will work with infrastructure providers to prepare a new Infrastructure Delivery Plan²⁴ (IDP). This will provide a prioritised list of the strategic infrastructure needed to successfully deliver the new local plan. It should include information on the timescale for delivery, the estimated cost of provision, how it will be funded and who will be responsible for its provision. The IDP will be subject to public consultation as part of the wider new local plan preparation process.

24 <https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/pdf/planning/spatial-planning/researchand-evidence/other-studies-and-information/en-ldf-submissionidp.pdf>