



## New local plan for Cheshire East

### Towns and villages topic paper (draft)

March 2024

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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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# Contents

|          |   |           |
|----------|---|-----------|
| <b>1</b> | <b>Introduction .....</b>                         | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>2</b> | <b>A hierarchy of settlements .....</b>           | <b>5</b>  |
|          | Current hierarchy .....                           | 5         |
|          | Updating the hierarchy .....                      | 7         |
| <b>3</b> | <b>Meeting our future development needs .....</b> | <b>9</b>  |
|          | Current distribution of development .....         | 9         |
|          | Distribution of development in the new plan ..... | 10        |
|          | Making the best use of land .....                 | 11        |
|          | Selection of sites .....                          | 11        |
| <b>4</b> | <b>Community facilities .....</b>                 | <b>13</b> |
| <b>5</b> | <b>Your town or village .....</b>                 | <b>14</b> |

# 1 Introduction

**1.1** This topic paper provides further information to support the 'Towns and villages' 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** Cheshire East is a large borough, covering a wide geographic area. It has a large number of towns and villages which vary greatly in their size, character, function and form. It is important to make sure that the places where the majority of development takes place have good access to jobs, transport, community facilities, education, shops, leisure, and open spaces. As with previous local plans, it is likely that our larger towns and villages will continue to be the focus for new development in the future.

**1.3** The new local plan will need to consider the development needs and opportunities in each settlement and set a strategy for the distribution of development. It will also need to consider community facilities and there is the opportunity to address any particular issues identified in individual towns and villages.



## 2 A hierarchy of settlements

**2.1** Although there is no specific requirement in national policy to set a hierarchy of settlements through the local plan, it is a very common approach to do so. In a borough like Cheshire East, with a large number of very different types of settlements, setting a settlement hierarchy will form an integral part of the future planning strategy.

**2.2** A settlement hierarchy itself is simply a classification of settlements. However, it will help to inform other issues in the plan, such as the spatial distribution of development, the approach to site allocations and the definition of individual settlement and/or infill boundaries.

**2.3** Developing a settlement hierarchy helps to direct different types of development to different types of places, and help to achieve sustainable development by:

- Improving accessibility: locating development in locations that can be accessed by active and sustainable travel modes.
- Delivering sustainable patterns of development: identifying locations that offer a range of facilities, services, employment opportunities and infrastructure.
- Tackling climate change: promoting self-sufficient settlements where community needs for jobs, housing, services and facilities are provided and reducing the need to travel.
- Improving the viability of services: the provision of existing services can be supported by new development.
- Promoting vibrant communities: improving the environment and raising the quality of life of residents by promoting inclusive and locally distinctive places and communities.
- Making the best use of land: by encouraging re-use of brownfield and urban land.

### Current hierarchy

**2.4** The current local plan has four tiers in its settlement hierarchy and sets a strategy for development in each:

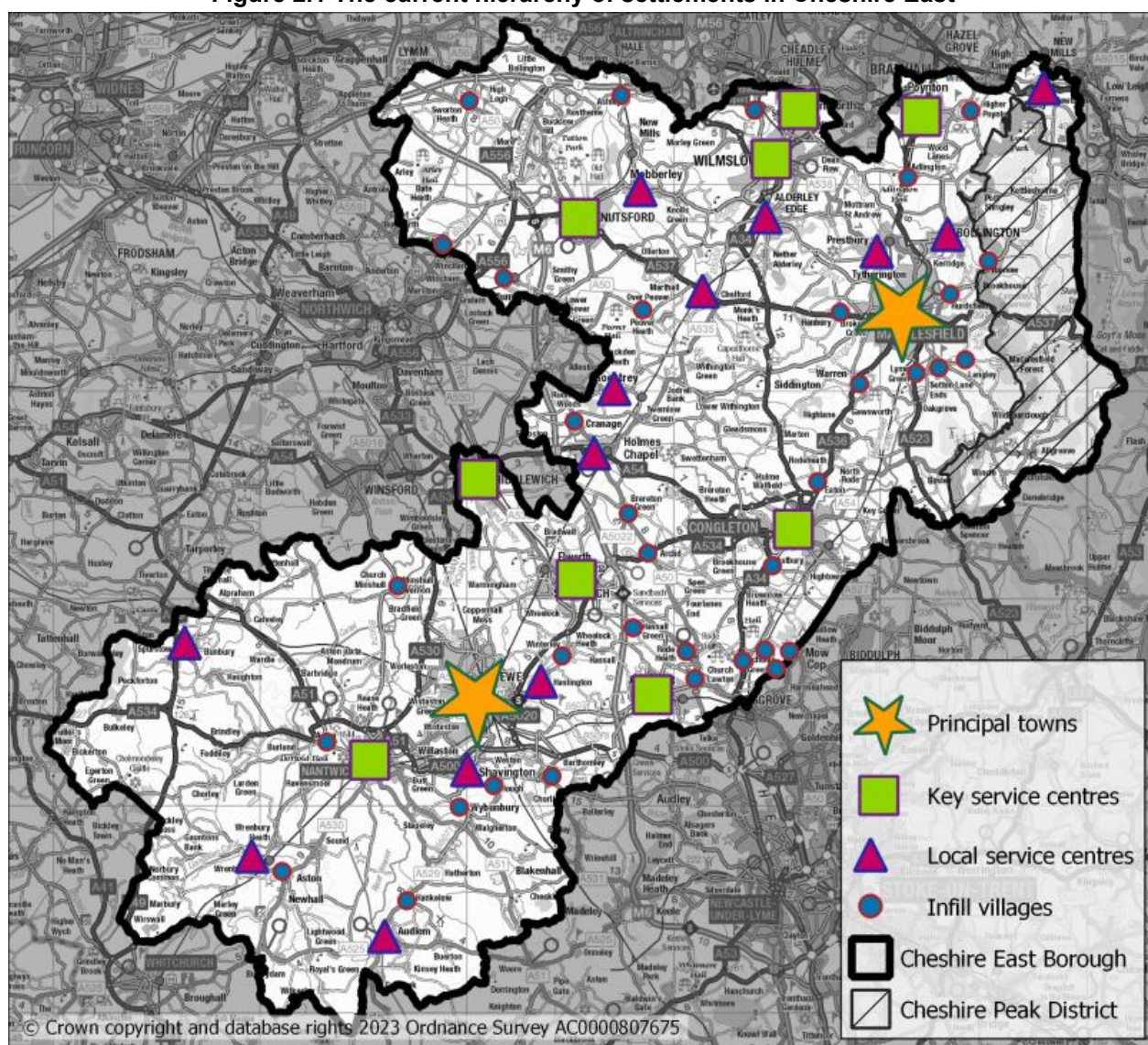
- **Principal towns** (Crewe and Macclesfield): significant development will be encouraged to support their revitalisation, recognising their role as the most important settlements in the borough. Development will maximise the use of existing infrastructure and resources to allow jobs, homes and other facilities to be located close to each other and accessible by public transport.
- **Key service centres** (Alsager, Congleton, Handforth, Knutsford, Middlewich, Nantwich, Poynton, Sandbach and Wilmslow): development of a scale, location and nature that recognises and reinforces the distinctiveness of each individual town will be supported to maintain their vitality and viability.
- **Local service centres** (Alderley Edge, Audlem, Bollington, Bunbury, Chelford, Disley, Goostrey, Haslington, Holmes Chapel, Mobberley, Prestbury, Shavington and Wrenbury): small scale development to meet needs and priorities will be supported where it contributes to the creation and maintenance of sustainable communities.

- **Other settlements and rural areas:** growth and investment should be confined to proportionate development at a scale commensurate with the function and character of the settlement and confined to locations well related to the existing built up extent of the settlement, in the interests of sustainable development and the maintenance of local services. It may be appropriate for local needs to be met within larger settlements, dependent on location.

**2.5** Within the ‘other settlements and rural areas’ tier, the current plan also lists 35 ‘infill villages’, where limited infilling is appropriate within the defined village boundary. These are: Acton, Adlington, Arclid, Ashley, Astbury, Aston, Brereton Green, Church Minshull, Cranage, Eaton, Gawsworth, Hankelow, Hassall Green, Henbury, High Legh, Higher Hursfield, Higher Poynton, Hough, Langley, Lawtongate and Lawton Heath, Lyme Green, Mount Pleasant, Mow Cop, Over Peover, Pickmere, Plumley, Rainow, Rode Heath, Scholar Green, Styal, Sutton Lane Ends, The Bank, Winterley, Wybunbury and Wychwood Village.

**2.6** The locations of all the principal towns, key service centres, local service centres and infill villages are shown in Figure 2.1 below.

**Figure 2.1 The current hierarchy of settlements in Cheshire East**



## Updating the hierarchy

**2.7** The new local plan will need to consider the approach to reviewing and updating the settlement hierarchy. There is no specific guidance in national policy or guidance to inform the approach to determining a settlement hierarchy and there have been a variety of approaches taken to inform different local plans. Common themes looked at include the availability of services, facilities and public transport in settlements. Other factors considered in some reviews looked at the retail role, population size, the Office for National Statistics classification, and the distance from other settlements. It can also be seen that some studies take a more comprehensive approach than others, depending on the local circumstances.

**2.8** Cheshire East is a large borough, covering a wide geographic area with a large number of different settlements, which vary greatly in their size, character, function and form. The setting of a settlement hierarchy will be an important part of the plan strategy and will help to inform other matters (such as the spatial distribution of development, the approach to site allocations, and the definition of individual settlement and/or infill boundaries). As a result, it may be appropriate to follow a relatively comprehensive assessment process to make sure that all the relevant factors are considered for all the different types of settlements.

**2.9** A draft methodology<sup>1</sup> has been produced, which proposes to assess the function, size and sustainability of settlements, looking at the following factors for each settlement:

- Level of services and facilities.
- Availability of sustainable transport options.
- Population size.
- Employment role and the number of jobs.
- Retail role and the number of retail units.
- Spatial form (whether the settlement is a clear cluster of development or whether it is more dispersed and sparsely populated).

**2.10** The draft methodology proposes to look at all of these factors across all settlements (large and small) to assess them all on a consistent basis. As set out above, the current plan includes four tiers in the settlement hierarchy, but the final tier (other settlements and rural areas) includes the defined 'infill villages' plus the other rural areas. The draft methodology proposes to categorise settlements into five tiers, which would enable the new plan to include the equivalent of the current 'infill villages' as a separate tier in the hierarchy. This would enable the new plan to define the type and scale of development appropriate in those settlements as part of its overall strategy.

**2.11** The draft methodology proposes to use similar names to the current tiers of the hierarchy: principal towns, key service centres, local service centres, infill villages/sustainable villages, and rural areas. However, we recognise that these are rather technical labels and not easily understood. We would be interested in hearing suggestions for naming the proposed five tiers in the settlement hierarchy.

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<sup>1</sup> The Draft Methodology for Determining the Settlement Hierarchy can be viewed at alongside the other consultation documents at [www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/newlocalplan](http://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/newlocalplan)

**2.12** The full detail of the proposed approach to determining a new settlement hierarchy is set out in the draft methodology report and we also invite your comments on this document.



## 3 Meeting our future development needs

**3.1** As required by national policy, the new local plan will need to set out an overall strategy for the scale and pattern of development. In addition to infrastructure, community facilities and conservation/enhancement of the natural and built environment, the new local plan will specifically need to make sufficient provision for:

- Housing (including affordable housing).
- Employment development (such as offices, research and development units, industrial units, warehouses and other storage/distribution uses).
- Retail, leisure and other commercial development.

**3.2** The overall amount of each of these types of development will need to be considered and the issues related to the total quantity of development are considered in the Homes for everyone topic paper; Jobs skills and economy topic paper; and the Town centres and retail topic paper. Once the overall amount of development has been determined, the new local plan will need to set a strategy for the distribution of this development across the borough.

### Current distribution of development

**3.3** The current strategy for the spatial distribution of development is set out in Policy PG 7 of the Local Plan Strategy. This sets the indicative levels of development by settlement that will enable delivery of the total 36,000 new homes and 380ha land for employment uses over the 20 year period from 2010 to 2030. The amount of new retail development in the current plan is relatively modest and is planned to be met through the development of allocated sites where these include an element of retailing, plus additional retail development in the principal town centres of Crewe and Macclesfield.

**Table 3.1 Distribution of development in the current plan**

| Settlement             | Current tier in hierarchy | Total new homes 2010-2030 | Total amount of land for employment uses 2010-2030 |
|------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| Crewe                  | Principal town            | 7,700                     | 65ha   |
| Macclesfield           | Principal town            | 4,250                     | 20ha   |
| Alsager                | Key service centre        | 2,000                     | 40ha   |
| Congleton              | Key service centre        | 4,150                     | 24ha   |
| Handforth <sup>A</sup> | Key service centre        | 2,200                     | 22ha   |
| Knutsford              | Key service centre        | 950                       | 15ha   |
| Middlewich             | Key service centre        | 1,950                     | 75ha   |
| Nantwich               | Key service centre        | 2,050                     | 3ha  |
| Poynton                | Key service centre        | 650                       | 10ha   |

| Settlement                                     | Current tier in hierarchy         | Total new homes 2010-2030 | Total amount of land for employment uses 2010-2030 |
|--|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| Sandbach                                       | Key service centre                | 2,750                     | 20ha   |
| Wilmslow                                       | Key service centre                | 900                       | 10ha   |
| All local service centres <sup>B</sup>         | Local service centre              | 3,500                     | 7ha  |
| Other settlements and rural areas <sup>C</sup> | Other settlements and rural areas | 2,950                     | 69ha   |
| <b>Total</b>                                   |                                   | <b>36,000</b>             | <b>380ha</b>                                       |

A The current figures for Handforth include the proposed Handforth Garden Village.

B Current local service centres are: Alderley Edge, Audlem, Bollington, Bunbury, Chelford, Disley, Goostrey, Haslington, Holmes Chapel, Mobberley, Prestbury, Shavington and Wrenbury.

C The other settlements and rural areas figures include the existing strategic development sites at Wardle and Alderley Park.

## Distribution of development in the new plan

**3.4** As part of the production of the new local plan, we will need to provide evidence to support a proposed distribution of development across the borough.

**3.5** This will inevitably be a complex piece of work, which will need to take account of many competing issues and priorities. Some of the types of factors that could be considered when determining a future spatial distribution of development are set out below.

### Settlement-specific factors

- Housing demand and availability.
- House prices and affordability ratios (ratios of average house prices compared to average earnings).
- Need for affordable housing.
- Need for housing of different types, such as that for first time buyers and young families, or specialist housing for older people).
- Number and availability of jobs.
- Commuting patterns.

### Opportunities

- Market attractiveness of locations / levels of development viability.
- Availability of development sites.
- Amount of brownfield and urban land that may become available for re-use.

### Constraints

- Landscape character and designations.

- Biodiversity and presence of nature conservation sites, such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest.
- Historic environment and heritage assets.
- Flood risk.
- Agricultural land quality.
- Open space and green infrastructure.
- Green Belt and strategic green gap areas.

## Making the best use of land

**3.6** As required by national policy, the new local plan will need to set out a strategy to accommodate the overall needs for development in a way that makes as much use as possible of previously-developed (brownfield) land.

**3.7** Since the start of the current local plan period in 2010, around 39% of new homes and 48% of employment floorspace have been developed on brownfield sites.

## Selection of sites

**3.8** The plan will also need to provide a clear strategy for bringing sufficient land forward and at a sufficient rate to enable the needs for development to be met over the plan period. Further work will need to be carried out to assess the capacity of sites to accommodate new development but it is likely that additional development sites will need to be allocated to meet needs.

**3.9** To make sure that the most appropriate sites are chosen, we will need to appraise all candidates using a site selection methodology, so that all sites can be assessed on a consistent basis. The previous site selection process<sup>2</sup> considered factors including:

- Green Belt issues.
- Economic viability.
- Landscape impact.
- Impact on settlement character and urban form.
- Whether the site is in a strategic green gap.
- The compatibility of neighbouring uses.
- Highways access and highways impacts.
- Impacts on any nearby heritage assets.
- Flooding and drainage issues.
- Impacts on ecology and nature.
- Presence of any Tree Preservation Orders on or adjacent to the site.
- Whether the site is in an Air Quality Management Area.
- Whether the site is within or adjacent to an area of mineral interest.
- Accessibility of the site to important services and facilities.
- Availability and frequency of public transport frequency.

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2 Available at [https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/planning/spatial-planning/cheshire\\_east\\_local\\_plan/site-allocations-and-policies/sadpd-examination/documents/examination-library/ED07-Site-Selection-Methodology-Report.pdf](https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/planning/spatial-planning/cheshire_east_local_plan/site-allocations-and-policies/sadpd-examination/documents/examination-library/ED07-Site-Selection-Methodology-Report.pdf)

- Whether the site is previously-developed land or greenfield (or a mixture).
- Whether the site is agricultural land and the quality of the land.
- Consideration of any land contamination issues.
- Whether the proposed use of the site would lead to a loss of employment land.
- Distance to existing employment areas.

**3.10** The government is considering of standard templates for some aspects of local plan evidence gathering, and it might be that in future the methodology for selecting sites for inclusion in a plan is prescribed at a national level. However, there is currently no certainty in this respect and until there is, we will need to consider the appropriate factors for us to apply when selecting sites.



## 4 Community facilities

**4.1** Community facilities can make a positive contribution to the social or cultural life of the community. Facilities such as public houses; places of worship; village halls and other meeting places; schools; and local shops are important to the communities that they serve, and they improve the sustainability of towns, villages, and rural areas. Cheshire East has a variety of different communities, ranging from large towns to villages and rural settlements.

**4.2** There is also a network of formal and informal community groups, which together provide an enormous range of activities, support, and services.

**4.3** The new local plan will need to consider how it can best support the retention and enhancement of community facilities.

## 5 Your town or village

**5.1** The new local plan may also be able to include policies to address specific issues in specific town. For example, the current plan includes specific policies to guide the regeneration and improvement of Crewe town centre and Macclesfield town centre. Other ways in which it could help include (for example) the provision of affordable housing for local people, directing development to locations where it can help to contribute towards the provision of a particular piece of infrastructure, or allocation of smaller sites in villages to help maintain local shops and facilities.

**5.2** Cheshire East is one of the leading areas in the country for the production of neighbourhood plans, with 38 completed neighbourhood plans<sup>3</sup> in place. These plans form part of the statutory development plan for Cheshire East and their policies must be considered in making decisions on planning applications. They are produced by local neighbourhood planning groups, usually in partnership with the local town or parish council. Place specific issues are often best addressed in these more local neighbourhood plans, but there is also a role for the new local plan to reflect local aspirations and priorities as well.

**5.3** The issues paper asks about any specific issues in specific towns or villages that may need to be addressed in the new local plan.

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3 Completed neighbourhood plans are all available at <https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/planning/neighbourhood-plans/completed-neighbourhood-plans.aspx>