



New local plan for Cheshire East

Settlement hierarchy (draft methodology)

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 Cheshire East Council will be preparing a new local plan for the borough, covering the period into the 2040s. The borough has a large number of settlements, which differ greatly in terms of their size, role, and provision of services and facilities. The current local plan sets a hierarchy of settlements and this report considers the methodology that could be used to review and update this hierarchy for the new plan.

Purpose

1.2 There is no specific requirement in national policy to include a settlement hierarchy in a local plan, but it is a common approach to do so. The settlement hierarchy will form a fundamental part of the future 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).

1.3 The definition of a settlement hierarchy will assist in achieving 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.
- Make the best use of land: by encouraging the re-use of brownfield and urban land.

1.4 The purpose of this report is to consider the methodology to carry out an updated settlement hierarchy study. This future study will then provide the evidence base to inform the approach to the settlement hierarchy in the new Cheshire East Local Plan. It considers the overall approach to determining a settlement hierarchy, including setting the appropriate tiers in the hierarchy. It also considers the data to be collected to justify the inclusion of individual settlements within each tier of the proposed hierarchy.

Scope

1.5 The settlement hierarchy report will form part of the evidence base for the new Cheshire East Local Plan and will be used to help develop future planning policies. In particular, it will look at:

- The reasons and context for setting a settlement hierarchy.
- The structure and definition of the settlement hierarchy proposed for Cheshire East.

- The overall methodology for populating the settlement hierarchy.
- Collection of a range of data for different settlements.
- Analysis of the data collected to inform the settlements to include in each tier of the hierarchy.

1.6 This evidence base report will look only at the settlement hierarchy itself. It will not look at any potential future strategy for development, including the overall level of development or the spatial distribution of that development to particular tiers of the hierarchy or to individual settlements.

1.7 The study will look at the current function of settlements to categorise them as part of a particular tier in the hierarchy and will not consider any constraints to future development in settlements.

1.8 The strategy for development in the current local plan is to direct the majority of new development to settlements in the higher tiers of the settlement hierarchy. However, further evidence base work will be required to inform the future strategy for development in the new local plan and any potential distribution of that development to different tiers or settlements within the hierarchy. The proposed settlement hierarchy will be an input when considering the future spatial distribution of development, but there will also be many other factors to consider including any constraints to development in particular settlements.

Study area

1.9 The borough of Cheshire East is bounded by Cheshire West and Chester to the west; Warrington and Greater Manchester to the north; the Potteries to the south and the Peak District National Park to the east. It is a large borough, with many towns, villages and rural areas that vary greatly in character. The study considers settlements within the borough, excluding the part falling within the national park. The Peak District National Park Authority is the local planning authority for the areas within the national park.

Report structure

1.10 The report will be structured as follows (draft chapters 1-4 are set out in this draft methodology report and the remaining chapters 5-8 will be completed once the methodology is finalised):

- Chapter 1 will introduce the study, setting out its purpose, scope and area.
- Chapter 2 will review the planning policy context for determining a settlement hierarchy in a local plan and look at approaches from elsewhere.
- Chapter 3 will consider the overall approach to setting a settlement hierarchy through the new local plan.
- Chapter 4 will describe the methodology for populating that hierarchy.
- Chapter 5 will set out the long list of settlements for consideration.
- Chapter 6 will describe how the relevant data was collected.
- Chapter 7 will provide an analysis of the data for each settlement.
- Chapter 8 will review the data in the round and populate the proposed settlement hierarchy.

2 Policy context

National Planning Policy Framework

2.1 Whilst the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)¹ does not specifically refer to a settlement hierarchy, it does contain several paragraphs that will help to inform how the council should seek to guide development to the most sustainable locations, and the principle of defining a settlement hierarchy is consistent with the NPPF.

2.2 Paragraph 8 references the three overarching objectives of the planning system. The economic objective requires sufficient land of the right types to be available in the right places. The social objective a sufficient number and range of homes are provided to meet the needs of present and future generations, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being. The environmental objective requires us to make effective use of land, minimise waste and pollution, and mitigate and adapt to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.

2.3 Paragraph 11 notes that the presumption in favour of sustainable development means that, for plan-making, plans should promote a sustainable pattern of development that seeks to: meet the development needs of their area; align growth and infrastructure; improve the environment; mitigate climate change (including by making effective use of land in urban areas) and adapt to its effects.

2.4 Paragraph 16 requires that plans should be prepared with the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development.

2.5 Paragraph 20 confirms that strategic policies should set out an overall strategy for the pattern and scale of development.

2.6 Paragraph 83: To promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. Planning policies should identify opportunities for villages to grow and thrive, especially where this will support local services. Where there are groups of smaller settlements, development in one village may support services in a village nearby.

2.7 Paragraph 84 requires that planning policies and decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside (with exceptions).

2.8 Paragraph 89: Planning policies and decisions should recognise that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport. In these circumstances it will be important to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings, does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads and exploits any opportunities to make a location more sustainable (for example by improving the scope for access on foot, by cycling or by public transport). The use of previously developed land, and sites that are physically well-related to existing settlements, should be encouraged where suitable opportunities exist.

1 The NPPF is available at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework>

2.9 Paragraph 97: To provide the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies and decisions should plan positively for the provision and use of shared spaces, community facilities (such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments; and ensure an integrated approach to considering the location of housing, economic uses and community facilities and services.

2.10 Paragraph 108: Opportunities from existing or proposed transport infrastructure, and charging technology and usage should be realised, for example in relation to the scale, location or density of development that can be accommodated; and opportunities to promote walking, cycling and public transport use should be identified and pursued.

2.11 Paragraph 109: The planning system should actively manage patterns of growth in support of these objectives. Significant development should be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes. This can help to reduce congestion and emissions, and improve air quality and public health. However, opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas, and this should be taken into account in both plan-making and decision-making.

2.12 Paragraph 159: New development should be planned for in ways that can help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, such as through its location....

2.13 Paragraph 180: Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

Local policy and guidance

2.14 The current local plan² consists of the Local Plan Strategy (LPS) adopted in 2017, the Site Allocations and Development Policies Document (SADPD) adopted in 2022, made neighbourhood plans plus saved policies from the Cheshire Waste Local Plan (adopted in 2007) and Cheshire Minerals Local Plan (adopted in 1999).

2.15 The current settlement hierarchy is set by LPS Policy PG 2 'Settlement hierarchy', which classifies settlements into four tiers:

- Principal towns (PTs): Crewe; Macclesfield.
- Key service centres (KSCs): Alsager; Congleton; Handforth; Knutsford; Middlewich; Nantwich; Poynton; Sandbach; Wilmslow.
- Local service centres (LSCs): Alderley Edge; Audlem; Bollington; Bunbury; Chelford; Disley; Goostrey; Haslington; Holmes Chapel; Mobberley; Prestbury; Shavington; Wrenbury.
- Other settlements and rural areas (OSRA): everywhere else.

² The current local plan is available at <https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/localplan>

2.16 Policy PG 2 defines the scale of development that will be appropriate for settlements in each tier of the hierarchy. The LPS follows a strategy to direct the majority of new development to the upper tiers of the hierarchy, and the scale of development appropriate in each settlement is proportionate to its position in the hierarchy; i.e. the further up the hierarchy, the more development will be appropriate.

2.17 The SADPD does not alter the LPS settlement hierarchy, but it does identify a further set of 'Infill Villages' within the OSRA tier. These are Acton, Adlington, Arclid, Ashley, Astbury; Aston; Brereton Green; Church Minshull; Cranage; Eaton; Gawsworth; Hankelow; Hassall Green; Henbury; High Legh; Higher Hurdsfield; 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.

2.18 The SADPD also sets settlement boundaries for each settlement in the PT, KSC and LSC tiers of the hierarchy, plus infill boundaries for each of the infill villages in the OSRA tier.

Settlement hierarchy evidence

Cheshire East

2.19 The settlement hierarchy in the current local plan was informed by the 'Determining the Settlement Hierarchy' report produced in 2010. The levels in the hierarchy were consistent with the then North West Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS), which proposed that development should be tiered in a settlement hierarchy consisting of towns of regional significance (including Crewe and Macclesfield), KSCs and LSCs. The RSS deferred the identification of KSCs and LSCs to individual planning authorities in their own Local Development Frameworks (now known as local plans).

2.20 The Determining the Settlement Hierarchy Report followed a three stage methodology:

1. Prepare an initial 'long list' of candidate settlements; and identify how many out of a list of 12 essential services were present in each of these settlements. Those with 5 or more essential services were put forward to stage 2; those with 2-4 essential services were considered further to Determine whether to put them forward to stage 2; whilst those with 0 or 1 essential services were not considered further and were placed in the OSRA tier of the hierarchy.
2. Carry out a detailed analysis of the role and function of the 24 settlements in stage 2, considering: community facilities; population; employment (including settlement containment); retail; and sustainable transport.
3. Bring together the analysis from stage 2, look at it all in the round and categorise each of the 24 settlements into the various tiers of the hierarchy.

2.21 The evidence for the OSRA settlements identified as infill villages in the SADPD was set out in the 'Settlement and Infill Boundaries Review' produced in 2020. This utilised the 'long list' of OSRA settlements from the Determining the Settlement Hierarchy report, supplemented by a review of the OS mapping to identify any additional settlements for consideration.

2.22 For each settlement, the review then considered:

- The level of service/facility provision.
- The availability of public transport.
- Whether or not the settlement has a coherent spatial form.

2.23 For services and facilities, the report acknowledged that the ‘essential services’ considered in the Determining the Settlement Hierarchy Report are the type usually found in higher order, larger centres and therefore also considered seven ‘local services’. Settlements with 3 or more services/facilities were considered to have the potential to be an infill village.

2.24 Settlements with any availability of public transport (bus or train service) were also considered to have the potential to be an infill village.

2.25 Settlements with a coherent spatial form (critical mass of development/clear cluster(s) of development/clear centre etc) were considered to have the potential to be an infill village, whereas those with small clusters of houses/sparsely located properties/lack of any critical mass were not.

2.26 Those settlements that had the potential to be an infill village under all 3 of the factors were defined as such. Those that had potential under 0 or 1 factors were not defined as infill villages. For those that had potential under 2 of the factors, further consideration of the estimated population was carried out, with those with at least 500 population being classed as infill villages.

Approaches elsewhere

Eastleigh

2.27 The Eastleigh Local Plan was found sound in May 2022. The supporting settlement hierarchy evidence looked at:

- The type of retail centre in each settlement (a town, district or local centre or neighbourhood parade).
- Essential services (convenience stores and post offices).
- Education facilities (primary and secondary schools, other educational establishments).
- Employment (major employers and office locations).
- Health care (doctors and dentists).
- Community and play facilities (libraries, pubs, leisure/entertainment facilities, community venues, places of worship, play areas, outdoor sports facilities, indoor sports facilities, amenity space, country parks, allotments and cemeteries/crematorium).
- Public transport services (daily bus services running at least hourly and at least 3 times per day).

2.28 The factors were then scored to place the settlements into one of four tiers (level 1 settlements – level 4 settlements).

2.29 During the examination, the Inspector was concerned that the evidence was dated and the council provided some additional information to justify the hierarchy.

Brentwood

2.30 The Brentwood Local Plan was found sound in February 2022. On submission, the evidence underpinning the settlement hierarchy consisted of some very limited contextual information in the submitted plan itself, looking at the size and character of settlements. During the examination, the council submitted some additional work to justify the settlement hierarchy proposed. This looked at:

- ONS rural classification.
- Population.
- Public transport.
- The type of retail centre in each settlement.
- Retail and supporting facilities/services.
- Schools.
- Healthcare facilities.

2.31 Whilst the additional evidence presented the data in each of these areas, it did not provide any analysis of this data or any judgments regarding the placement of any settlement into any tier.

Wycombe

2.32 The Wycombe Local Plan was found sound in 2019. The supporting evidence included a settlement hierarchy study which looked at:

- Population size.
- Provision of key services (post office, food shop, primary school, GP surgery, pub, village/community hall, recreation ground/playing fields, access to high speed broadband).
- Provision of higher order services (secondary schools, dentists, pharmacies, indoor sports/leisure centres, libraries).
- Accessibility, including the travel distance to higher-tier settlements, availability of public transport and consideration of known future investments.

2.33 An overall qualitative judgement was made on the overall analysis rather than the use of a scoring system. This grouped the settlements into one of six tiers in the hierarchy.

3 Approach to a new settlement hierarchy

3.1 There is no specific guidance to inform the approach to determining a settlement hierarchy. A variety of approaches have informed settlement hierarchies in different local plans that were found to be sound at examination.

3.2 The reviewed approaches all look at common themes such as the availability of services, facilities and public transport. Other factors considered in some of the studies include looking at the retail role, population size, ONS classification and distance from other settlements. It can also be seen that some studies take a more comprehensive approach than others, dependent on the local circumstances.

3.3 Cheshire East is a large borough, covering a wide geographic area. It also contains 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.

3.4 The previous approach to inform the existing settlement hierarchy in Cheshire East looked at the higher order settlements in more detail than lower order settlements. This enabled the designation of the current, four-tier hierarchy through a strategic policy in the LPS. During the development of the subsequent SADPD, it was considered appropriate to identify a subset of 'infill villages' within the lowest (OSRA) tier of the hierarchy. Further analysis of the lower order settlements was carried out during the preparation of the SADPD to inform this, and the plan designates a set of 'infill villages' within the OSRA tier as a non-strategic policy.

3.5 The approach to the new local plan in Cheshire East is to bring forward a single plan containing both strategic and non-strategic policies. As a result, it will be beneficial to consider all settlements on a consistent basis to inform a new settlement hierarchy. Given the large number and variety of settlements in the borough, it is considered appropriate to retain the top three levels of the hierarchy, as these will enable sufficient distinction in the planning strategy for larger settlements of different sizes and characters.

3.6 Given the very large number of smaller settlements in the borough, it may also be appropriate to expand the final level of the hierarchy (the 'other settlements and rural areas') to include two tiers. In effect, this would replicate the existing 'infill villages' and the other (undefined) settlements in the OSRA tier, except the 'infill villages' equivalent would be a separate tier, rather than being a subset within the OSRA tier. This would enable the new plan to define a strategy for development in this additional tier, rather than being included with the remainder of the OSRA settlements.

3.7 The potential structure of a new settlement hierarchy is set out in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1 Potential settlement hierarchy structure

Tier in settlement hierarchy	Characteristics of settlements	Settlements
1. Principal towns	Principal towns are the largest, most prominent settlements in the borough with the largest populations. Their influence extends significantly outside of their own area, and they provide significant levels of employment, retail, education, services and facilities. They serve a large catchment area, with high levels of accessibility and well developed public transport networks.	Listed in the hierarchy.
2. Key service centres	Key service centres are notable settlements, with sizable populations. They provide a wide range of services and opportunities for employment, retail and education. They serve a wide catchment area in addition their own population and contain public transport links.	Listed in the hierarchy.
3. Local service centres	Local service centres have a modest size population and provide a range of services and facilities to help meet the needs of local people, as well as those living nearby in smaller settlements. The availability of public transport and the range of employment, retail and education services and facilities may be more limited than in the higher order settlements.	Listed in the hierarchy.
4. Infill villages/ sustainable villages	Infill villages/sustainable villages have a relatively small population. They may provide some limited services and facilities to help meet the needs of local people, but these will not usually be sufficient to meet all day to day needs. Public transport provision may be infrequent.	Listed in the hierarchy.
5. Rural areas	Smaller and/or more dispersed settlements and clusters of development, with few (if any) services and facilities, public transport and employment facilities.	All other settlements not listed in the hierarchy.

4 Methodology to populate the hierarchy

4.1 A four stage methodology is proposed to populate the tiers of the hierarchy:

1. Develop a long list of settlements for consideration.
2. Determine data to be collected and gather data for each settlement on the long list.
3. Analyse the data collected for each settlement.
4. Populate the proposed hierarchy.

Stage 1: Long list of settlements for consideration

4.2 The first stage in populating the hierarchy is to draw up a list of settlements for further consideration. This does not need to include every single small hamlet or group of buildings in the countryside, as the final (rural areas) tier of the proposed hierarchy will not list the settlements within it. The long list should, however, include all settlements that could have the potential to be included within the top four tiers of the hierarchy (principal towns, key service centres, local service centres and infill villages/sustainable villages).

4.3 To be comprehensive, the long list should be as wide ranging as possible, i.e. all settlements with any potential (however remote) to be included in the top four tiers of the hierarchy should be included on the long list for further analysis.

4.4 A candidate list of 134 settlements is listed within the previous 'Determining the Settlement Hierarchy' Report (2010). The subsequent 'Settlement and Infill Boundaries Review' (2020) reviewed all settlements in the OSRA tier of the hierarchy, adding eight settlements and removing one (duplicate) settlement.

4.5 The long list of settlements for consideration will include all settlements named in the current hierarchy plus all the existing named 'infill villages'. The long list will also be informed by the lists from the previous studies, and supplemented by a review to determine whether any further settlements can be identified to be added to the long list:

- Review of the Ordnance Survey mapping.
- Review of local plan site allocations (particularly those not adjacent to existing higher order settlements).
- Review of approved planning applications (particularly those not adjacent to existing higher order settlements).

Stage 2: Data collection

4.6 Data will be collected on a number of factors for each settlement to enable an assessment of the function, size and sustainability of settlements.

Services and facilities

4.7 The presence of services and facilities is a vital component in establishing sustainable and self-contained settlements. The difference in the number, type and range of facilities that are present in a settlement can give a good indication of its

community service function. Settlements with a higher community service function tend to draw people from a larger catchment area. Data should be collected in different categories of services and facilities that would often be expected to be found in different types of settlement.

Higher order services

4.8 These are the services and facilities that serve a large population from a wide catchment area and would mainly be found only in principal towns, settlements in the top tier of the hierarchy.

- Cinema/theatre.
- Hospital/accident and emergency department.
- University or further education college.

Key services

4.9 These services and facilities serve the population of the settlement in which they are located, as well as drawing people from surrounding areas. They would mainly be found in settlements in the top two tiers of the settlement hierarchy (principal towns and key service centres).

- Bank/building society.
- Leisure centre/sports hall/swimming pool.
- Library (permanent).
- Post office.
- Public park.
- Secondary school (state funded).
- Supermarket or large convenience store (greater than 280sq.m GIA, which is the max size of a shop for local community use in use class F2).

Local services

4.10 These services and facilities have a more local focus, but may also serve people from nearby smaller settlements. They would mainly be found in settlements in the top three tiers of the settlement hierarchy (principal towns, key service centres and local service centres).

- Dental surgery.
- GP surgery.
- Local shop (convenience retail).
- Mobile library service.
- Nursery/crèche.
- Optician.
- Pharmacy.
- Primary school (state funded).

Other services

4.11 These other services, with a very local focus, may be found in all types of settlement, but mainly in settlements in the top four tiers of the settlement hierarchy (principal towns, key service centres, local service centres and infill/sustainable villages).

- Children's play area.
- Community centre/village hall/church hall/local meeting place.
- Place of worship.
- Post box.
- Public house/café/restaurant.
- Outdoor sports facility.

Sustainable transport

4.12 Sustainable and inclusive access to services, facilities and jobs by modes of transport other than the private car is important in the creation of sustainable communities. The presence of regular bus and rail services as well as other sustainable transport options will give an indication of a settlement's functionality in terms of its sustainable transport options. Higher levels and frequency of service are generally linked to higher order centres within a settlement hierarchy. Data should be collected on:

- Bus services (presence or not of a bus service; daytime frequency; principal destinations; whether the service is a commutable service; evening/weekend frequency).
- Rail services (presence or not of a railway station; daytime frequency; principal destinations; whether the service is a commutable service; evening/weekend frequency).
- Other transport options (cycle route or regional/national coach services).

Population

4.13 Population size has an important influence upon the functionality and role of a settlement. A larger population is generally able to sustain a greater level of services and facilities, retail provision, public transport and employment provision within a settlement. Data should be collected on the usual resident population of each settlement.

Employment

4.14 The number of jobs within a settlement provides a good indication of the strength of its employment role, with higher order settlements usually providing a stronger employment role. The level of self-containment (people who both live and work in the same settlement) can also provide further information on the employment role of the settlement, particularly with regard to its functional relationship with other settlements.

4.15 However, the travel to work data comes from the 2021 Census which took place during the coronavirus pandemic, a period of unparalleled and rapid change (the national lockdown, associated guidance and furlough measures will have affected the travel to work topic). Therefore, whilst useful to 'supplement' the data on number of jobs, the travel work data should be treated with caution.

4.16 Data should be collected on the number of jobs and level of self-containment

Retail

4.17 The presence of retail based shops and services is another factor which can be used to determine a settlement's role or function within a geographical area. The larger the level of provision the greater the sphere of influence a settlement is likely to have over its surrounding area and the more sustainable or self-contained it will be in meeting the shopping needs of its own residents. To determine a settlement's retail role, the number of units in designated retail centres should be looked at. For smaller settlements without a defined centre, these are unlikely to have a significant retail role but it will be appropriate to consider whether there is a limited local retail role despite the lack of defined centres. Data should be collected on the number of retail units.

Spatial form

4.18 When looking at the smaller, lower-order settlements, there are often differences in their spatial form with some forming clear, coherent settlements, whilst others are more dispersed in nature, or lack the critical mass to function as a village. By implication, there will also be a correlation between the level of services and public transport provision and the coherence of the settlements. A critical mass of development/clear cluster(s) of development/ clear centre to the settlement would indicate a coherent spatial form whilst small clusters of houses/sparsely located properties/lack of any critical mass would indicate the lack of a coherent spatial form. This measure is only likely to be useful for differentiating settlements in the lower tiers of the hierarchy as all higher-order settlements are likely to have a critical mass of development and a coherent spatial form.

Stage 3: Data analysis

4.19 Once collected, a full analysis of the data will be carried out to assess the function, size and sustainability of settlements. For each category of data collected, the tables below show the typical characteristics of settlements in different tiers of the hierarchy.

Services and facilities

Table 4.1 Provision of services and facilities in different tiers of the hierarchy

Tier in hierarchy	Typical characteristics of settlements
Principal towns	Contain the majority ³ of higher order services, key services, local services and other services.
Key service centres	Contain the majority of key services, local services and other services.
Local service centres	Contain the majority of local and other services.
Infill/sustainable villages	Contain the majority of other services.
Rural areas	Few or no services.

Sustainable transport

Table 4.2 Sustainable transport provision in different tiers of the hierarchy

Tier in hierarchy	Typical characteristics of settlements
Principal towns	Frequent, commutable daytime and frequent evening/weekend bus and train services serving a variety of local/regional and national destinations.
Key service centres	Frequent, commutable daytime and frequent evening/weekend bus and train services serving a variety of local/regional destinations.
Local service centres	Frequent, commutable bus or train services serving local destinations. Infrequent evening/weekend services.
Infill/sustainable villages	Bus or train service serving local destinations; may not be frequent or commutable.
Rural areas	No sustainable transport

4.20 Consideration should also be given to other active travel modes such as cycle routes, but as these are not accessible to all, they may not be as determinative of a settlement's function as the provision of bus and train services.

3 More than 50%

Population size

Table 4.3 Population of settlements in different tiers of the hierarchy

Tier in hierarchy	Typical characteristics of settlements
Principal towns	At least 10% of the total Cheshire East population.
Key service centres	Between 3% and 10% of the total Cheshire East population.
Local service centres	Between 1% and 3% of the total Cheshire East population.
Infill/sustainable villages	Between 0.1% and 1% of the total Cheshire East population.
Rural areas	Less than 0.1% of the total Cheshire East population.

Employment

Table 4.4 Employment provision in different tiers of the hierarchy

Tier in hierarchy	Typical characteristics of settlements
Principal towns	At least 10% of the total Cheshire East jobs.
Key service centres	Between 3% and 10% of the total Cheshire East jobs.
Local service centres	Between 1% and 3% of the total Cheshire East jobs.
Infill/sustainable villages	Between 0.1% and 1% of the total Cheshire East jobs.
Rural areas	Less than 0.1% of the total Cheshire East jobs.

Retail

Table 4.5 Retail provision in different tiers of the hierarchy

Tier in hierarchy	Typical characteristics of settlements
Principal towns	Strong retail role containing over 350 retail units with a town centre and other local centres or shopping parades. They provide a wide range of shops and a choice of large supermarkets to an extended catchment area.
Key service centres	Distinct retail role containing between 50 and 350 retail units with a town centre and other local centres or shopping parades. They provide a good range of shops that serve both residents and the wider surrounding community.
Local service centres	Locally significant retail role containing fewer than 50 retail units in a defined centre(s) or shopping parade(s).
Infill/sustainable villages	Limited retail role, with no defined centres or shopping parades.
Rural areas	No retail role.

Spatial form

4.21 A critical mass of development/clear cluster(s) of development/clear centre to the settlement would indicate a coherent spatial form whilst small clusters of houses/sparsely located properties/lack of any critical mass would indicate the lack of a coherent spatial form.

Table 4.6 Spatial form in different tiers of the hierarchy

Tier in hierarchy	Typical characteristics of settlements
Principal towns	Coherent spatial form present
Key service centres	Coherent spatial form present
Local service centres	Coherent spatial form present
Infill/sustainable villages	Coherent spatial form present
Rural areas	Lack of coherent spatial form

Stage 4: Populate the hierarchy

4.22 The final stage will be to consider the data across all categories and provide an overall commentary for each settlement. In many cases, the data will clearly indicate which tier of the hierarchy the settlement should be placed.

4.23 However, there may be instances where the data is not clear, or the settlement functions very differently across the different categories. In these cases, an element of professional judgement will be required and the overall consideration of which tier the settlement should be placed may also take account of the proximity to and links with other settlements.