

OPEN

## Highways & Transport Committee

23 January 2025

### Local Transport Plan 2025

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**Report of: Tom Moody, Director of Transport and Infrastructure**

**Report Reference No: HTC/40/24-25**

**Ward(s) Affected: All wards**

#### **Purpose of Report**

- 1 As a statutory Local Transport Authority, the Council is required to maintain an up-to-date Local Transport Plan (LTP). The purpose of this report is to update on the progress of a new LTP for Cheshire East, which will provide a policy framework for transport across the borough and guide investment in the local transport network. Work over 2024 has focused on defining problems and objectives, including production of a draft evidence base and draft vision and objectives for the next LTP.
- 2 This report outlines the work undertaken to date and seeks approval to undertake public consultation on the draft LTP vision and objectives included in Appendix 1. This report also seeks to establish a Member Reference Group to support the preparation of the LTP.

#### **Executive Summary**

- 3 The Local Transport Plan is a key part of the Council's policy framework, as it sets the local policy framework and investment priorities to meet the transport and travel needs of the borough. The current LTP was adopted in 2019 for the period of 2019-2024. Therefore, now the time is right for a new LTP document to ensure that the Council maintains a strategic policy framework that is robust and relevant to both national, regional and local priorities. The LTP will also set the context for future investment plans and prioritising within budget constraints, to contribute to overall policy outcomes including new housing, employment opportunities, sustainability, health and well-being.

- 4 The existing LTP 2019-2024 for Cheshire East was prepared pre-pandemic, and prior to many recent changes in transport policy. As a result, the current LTP is no longer fit-for-purpose as a framework for local transport within Cheshire East. In addition, within the context of recent and emerging changes to policy, for example, the Bus Service Improvement Plan and Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans, these raise potential implications and opportunities for local transport. To ensure that the Council has a clear, evidence-based position on these matters there is a need for them to be considered as part of our next LTP.
- 5 To support development of problems and objectives, a draft evidence base was developed in 2024 for the next LTP, noting some gaps which we are looking to fill around travel patterns. The evidence base has been grouped under five headings and this can be found in Appendix 2:
  - (a) Our Community – explores the demographics, health and digital connectivity profile across Cheshire East.
  - (b) Improve Transport for All – sets out the baseline position for all modes of travel, understanding the potential for mode shift and users experience.
  - (c) Grow the Economy – sets out understanding of the economic profile of the borough (e.g., skills, productivity, jobs distribution) and how jobs impact travel behaviour and connectivity requirements.
  - (d) Reduce Environmental Impacts – given that transport is a large carbon emitter, it is essential to consider the relationship between travel and the environment within a Cheshire East context.
  - (e) Trends – sets out some of the current transport trends and projections, and forecasts for what the future of transport may look like for Cheshire East.
- 6 A draft vision and objectives have also been prepared and are set out in Appendix 1. The draft vision is “A connected, safe and sustainable transport network, accessible to all, that supports a healthy, prosperous Cheshire East”. Aims and objectives have been developed around the themes of improving connections, improving the wellbeing our community, reducing environmental impacts and growing the economy.
- 7 In December 2024, the National Policy Planning Framework (NPPF) was revised, setting out how planning policy needs to be applied. Our approach to local transport objective-setting was produced prior to the release of this guidance however is flexible and able to adapt to changes in the spatial planning / development landscape for the

borough. The NPPF has three overarching objectives which need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways. The three objectives are based around the themes of the economy, social and the environment. Our draft LTP vision, aims and objectives align with these objectives.

- 8 Subject to approval by Committee, an 8-week consultation is proposed in early 2025 to seek the views of stakeholders and residents on the extent to which the public agree with the draft vision, aims and objectives and the role transport will play in achieving these. A Consultation and Engagement Plan and Communications Plan is included at Appendix 3 and Appendix 4.
- 9 Following the consultation, the initial next steps would be to consider the feedback received, refresh the vision, aims and objectives, and produce the LTP strategy. Progress on this would be reported to Committee in due course.
- 10 The report also recommends that an LTP Member Reference Group is established to act as an informal sounding board to support the preparation of the LTP.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

The Highways & Transport Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the updated Evidence Base for the next Local Transport Plan (see Appendix 2).
2. Approve the draft vision, aims and objectives set out at Appendix 1 as a basis for public consultation.
3. Approve the proposed approach to public consultation in line with the Consultation and Engagement Plan at Appendix 3 and Communications Plan at Appendix 4.
4. Delegate authority to the Director of Transport and Infrastructure to finalise the consultation material and undertake the public consultation.
5. Approve that a Member Reference Group is established to support the preparation of the Local Transport Plan with the proposed membership and Terms of Reference as set out in Appendix 5.

## Background

- 11 The existing LTP 2019-2024 for Cheshire East was prepared pre-pandemic, and prior to many recent changes in transport policy including, but not limited to: Gear Change (2020), The Transport Decarbonisation Plan (2021), Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy (2022) and Bus Back Better (2021). In addition, there is emerging evidence and strategy at the pan-Northern level by Transport for the

North including the Strategic Transport Plan and supporting documentation.

- 12 Local transport provision also needs to be considered in the context of recent and emerging local policy documents. This includes development of several specific local transport strategies, including the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Strategy (EVCIS) and Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs).
- 13 In addition, there is a need to capture changes in travel patterns that have emerged since COVID-19 and ensure our next LTP aligns to new patterns and habits. Also, we understand that technological advancements in recent years and future technological changes have the potential to change the landscape for transport over the next 10-15 years.
- 14 As a result of the above, the current LTP is no longer fit-for-purpose as a framework for local transport within Cheshire East. All these considerations raise potential implications and opportunities for local transport within Cheshire East. To ensure that the Council has a clear, evidence-based position on these matters there is a need for them to be considered as part of our next LTP. Our draft vision, aims and objectives allow for the above factors in having a robust set of outcomes that we continue to deliver.
- 15 Within the draft LTP evidence base, a broad range of sources have been included across all modes of travel, for example, 2021 Census, National Travel Survey and indices of deprivation in addition to local data the Council has access to. It has been identified that travel related 2021 Census data has limitations given that this was undertaken during COVID-19 where restrictions applied to travel. As a result, we are considering whether a household travel survey would be appropriate to fill this gap in knowledge. Work has also been commissioned to enhance our evidence base through mobile phone data. This will be analysed via Streetlight software which is a user interface to visualise transport data including for example road volumes, speeds and travel times.
- 16 With a draft evidence base and draft vision, aims and objectives now is a crucial time to consult and to gain public input into the LTP process.
- 17 It is important to note the English Devolution White Paper published in December 2024, which highlights the role of transport in many successful devolved authorities, including Mayoral Combined Authorities. While the impacts of this are still to be worked through,

there could be potential for a wider Cheshire and Warrington approach to transport in future.

- 18 To assist the preparation of the LTP, it is recommended that a Member Reference Group is established to act as an informal sounding board for officers throughout the lifecycle of the LTP development process. Formal decisions regarding the LTP would be made by the Highways and Transport Committee or Full Council. Draft Terms of Reference for the Group are appended to this report (see Appendix 5).

## **Consultation and Engagement**

- 19 A period of stakeholder and public consultation is proposed for 8 weeks in early 2025. Views will be sought from across the transport industry for example, the bus industry, service users, Town and Parish Councils, wider stakeholders, local businesses, and residents. The consultation will primarily be online, with several focus groups for targeted engagement, which will include schools and young people for example. A Consultation and Engagement Plan has been developed in conjunction with the Council's Research & Consultation Team (see Appendix 3), as well as a Communications Plan (see Appendix 4).

## **Reasons for Recommendations**

- 20 Noting work to date on the next LTP, consulting on the vision, aims and objectives and gaining public input at this stage will ensure that the Council is in a strong position to have a robust plan for the future of transport in the borough that the public have fed into.
- 21 It is important that LTP consultation follows the Gunning principles, and consulting on the LTP vision, aims and objectives now will ensure these are followed. The principles include ensuring consultation takes place at a formative stage, that enough time for consideration and response is given to the public and also in relation to any feedback and giving conscientious consideration to points raised where appropriate.
- 22 It would be beneficial to have a Member Reference Group to help guide the production of the forthcoming LTP work.

## **Other Options Considered**

- 23 As the LTP is a statutory document, there is a requirement to update the strategic policy framework, and consultation is an essential part of policy development. Without consultation at this stage, this could hinder the robustness of the future LTP and risk a lack of public support for it. Consulting now will ensure views are heard and can be incorporated into the next steps.

- 24 The LTP could be prepared without a Member Reference Group, however the benefit from having an informal Member sounding board to support the development of the LTP would not be achieved.

Option	Impact	Risk
Progress without consultation	Strategy progressed without public input	Lack of public support for the future LTP.
Progress without a Member Reference Group	No informal Member sounding board	Lack of Member buy-in to future LTP which could cause re-work.

## Implications and Comments

### *Monitoring Officer/Legal*

- 25 As the statutory Local Transport Authority, the Council is required to maintain an up-to-date LTP that provides a strategic framework for planning and delivery of improvements in local transport provision.
- 26 Development of the new LTP will need to be in accordance with statutory and legal requirements set out within Part II of the Transport Act 2000 and for Community Engagement, Equalities Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Appraisal.
- 27 Members must be fully aware of, and have themselves rigorously considered, the equalities implications of the decisions they are taking. This will ensure that there is proper appreciation of any potential impact of any decision on the Council's statutory obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty. As a minimum, this requires decision makers to read and carefully consider the content of any Equality Impact Assessments produced by officers.
- 28 There is no statutory duty to consult on proposals to change the way in which a local authority carries out its duties but there is an expectation enshrined in case law that any local authority making decisions affecting the public will do so fairly and in a way that cannot be said to be an abuse of power.
- 29 It is therefore important to test the fairness of the Council's approach by way of consultation on any changes which would have the effect of withdrawing existing benefits or advantages available to its residents. Such consultation should involve those directly affected by such changes together with the relevant representative groups. The responses to the consultation will need to be conscientiously taken into

account when Highways and Transport Committee makes any future decisions on the LTP.

- 30 It should be noted that breach of a duty to consult would risk the Council being subjected to legal challenge by way of judicial review.
- 31 Any Consultation must be conducted with adherence to the following:
- (a) the consultation must take place at a time when the proposals are still at a formative stage;
  - (b) the proposer must give sufficient reasons for any proposal to permit of intelligent consideration and response;
  - (c) adequate time must be given for consideration and response;
  - (d) the product of the consultation must be conscientiously taken into account in finalising the proposals.

#### *Section 151 Officer/Finance*

- 32 The LTP development work is funded by the Transport Policy and Rail and Transport Integration budgets. This programme of work has been built into the service plan for 2024/25 and 2025/26 and will be delivered within existing revenue budgets and the LTP capital programme with no impact on the MTFS.
- 33 Upon completion and adoption by the Council, the next LTP will provide a policy framework to inform the annual capital programme for transport. The LTP will be implemented utilising applicable funding from a range of sources including: LTP Integrated Transport Block funding; Section 106 & 278; the Council's capital and revenue programmes, one-off funding programmes and external funding. There is also the opportunity for the LTP to inform and influence other investment programmes across the Council, including public health, regeneration, carbon reduction etc.
- 34 The Council's capital programme remains under review with any schemes requiring Council resources being challenged in order to reduce the call on prudential borrowing.

#### *Policy*

- 35 Having an up-to-date LTP will ensure that the Council maintains a current statement of Local Transport Strategy in accordance with its responsibilities as the Local Transport Authority.
- 36 Cheshire East's Corporate Plan recognises the importance of transport in supporting key strategic objectives such as reducing air pollution,

reducing carbon emissions, enabling housing and employment growth, improving quality of place and protecting the environment. The LTP will also need to align to the emerging Cheshire East Plan, which will replace the Corporate Plan.

- 37 The LTP (2019-2024) outlines the role transport will play in supporting the goals to improve the economy, protect the environment, improve health and wellbeing and the quality of place. However, this will expire at the end of 2024 and therefore production of a new LTP is required in line with latest policies and strategies to have a long-term plan for transport across the borough.
- 38 The LTP draft vision, aims and objectives set out the ambition for “A connected, safe and sustainable transport network, accessible to all, that and supports a healthy, prosperous Cheshire East” and include aims and objectives around the themes of Improve Transport for All, Our Community, Reduce Environmental Impacts and Grow the Economy as seen in Appendix 1.

<b>An open and enabling organisation</b>	<b>A council which empowers and cares about people</b>	<b>A thriving and sustainable place</b>
Ensure that there is transparency in all aspects of council decision making	Work together with residents and partners to support people and communities to be strong and resilient	A great place for people to live, work and visit
Listen, learn and respond to our residents, promoting opportunities for a two-way conversation	Reduce health inequalities across the borough	Reduce impact on the environment
Support a sustainable financial future for the council, through service development, improvement and transformation		A transport network that is safe and promotes active travel
		Be a carbon neutral council by 2025

*Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*

- 39 The Council will fully evaluate the equality implications of the proposed LTP through an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA). The draft EqIA has been developed which focuses on the protected characteristic groups (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race/ethnicity, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation and marriage and civil partnership). Whilst the new LTP will impact the entire



borough, there is a need to engage with the protected groups to help better understand any impacts and identify mitigation if required. Therefore, a series of focus groups is proposed as part of the consultation period to gain input from some of these groups. The EqIA will be updated following consultation with protected equality groups, particularly young people, older people and people with disabilities. The draft EqIA is included at Appendix 6.

### *Human Resources*

40 There are no direct implications for Human Resources.

### *Risk Management*

41 In terms of governance and corporate oversight, a governance structure including a steering group has been established including colleagues from key enabling services. This will ensure that the process of undertaking the LTP is robust, as well providing as oversight of the LTP process. A risk register for the project has been developed and will be maintained throughout the life of the project.

### *Rural Communities*

42 The Corporate Plan outlines targets to reduce areas of the borough not served by public transport. The Corporate Plan also identifies the desire for thriving and active rural communities by 2025. The Council's Rural Action Plan (2022) highlights the importance of public transport links to help 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. The importance of transport for rural communities has been taken into consideration in the LTP evidence base and will be considered further in the next LTP. The LTP will also need to align to the emerging Cheshire East Plan, which will replace the Corporate Plan.

### *Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)*

43 The next LTP will consider home to school transport, including the current transformation programme that is working to optimise travel to and from schools and colleges. The Corporate Plan outlines the significant pressures in Children's Services, particularly placements for looked after children and services for children with special educational needs, including home to school transport.

### *Public Health*

44 There are pockets of deprivation in Cheshire East related to income, health and life chances. Transport infrastructure enables a greater proportion of residents to access important services such as health care facilities. The continued delivery of transport infrastructure and having a robust plan in place helps to address the Corporate Plan target to reduce inequalities across the borough. The LTP will need to be coordinated with the Council's wider strategic approaches to addressing public health outcomes. Officers from the Public Health service will be engaged in production of the strategy. The LTP will also need to align to the emerging Cheshire East Plan, which will replace the Corporate Plan.

*Climate Change*

45 Cheshire East Council have committed to be carbon neutral by 2027 and to influence carbon reduction across the borough in order to become a carbon neutral borough by 2045. This will be taken into consideration as part of the next LTP and has been considered within the Evidence Base document in Appendix 2.

<b>Access to Information</b>	
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Appendices:	1 – LTP vision and objectives 2 – Draft LTP Evidence Base 3 – Consultation and Engagement Plan 4 – Communications Plan 5 – Member Reference Group Terms of Reference 6 – Equality Impact Assessment
Background Papers:	None