

# CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

## REPORT TO: COUNCIL, CABINET & STRATEGIC PLANNING BOARD

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**Date of Meeting:** 18 February 2016 Strategic Planning Board

23 February 2016 Cabinet

26 February 2016 Council

**Report of:** Director of Planning & Sustainable Development.

**Subject/Title:** Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy – Proposed Changes

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr Rachel Bailey

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### 1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 This report requests that Council approves Proposed Changes to the Local Plan Strategy, alongside the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) and Sustainability (Integrated) Appraisal (SA) Addendums for public consultation. This follows the approval by Council on 28 February 2014 of the submission version of the Local Plan Strategy.
- 1.2 Cabinet and the Cabinet Portfolio Holder have previously endorsed suggested revisions to Chapters 1-8 and 9-14 of the plan at meetings on 21 July and 24 September 2015. The Changes attached to this report incorporate these previous revisions and also now include new and amended strategic sites in Chapter 15 of the Strategy. The SA and HRA Addendum reports consider the outcomes of the suggested revisions to Chapters 8 – 15 of the plan.
- 1.3 If approved, the Proposed Changes, alongside the SA and HRA, will be subject to a period of six weeks of consultation between 4 March and 19 April. All responses received will then be considered and submitted to the Local Plan Inspector before further Examination hearings are held later in the year.
- 1.4 The Proposed Changes are supported by a comprehensive suite of evidence. This includes the additional evidence endorsed by Cabinet of 21 July 2015. Added to this is further evidence to justify the selection of new and amended strategic sites - alongside the rationale for the retention of any sites unchanged from the Submitted Local Plan Strategy.
- 1.5 The Proposed Changes take account of the Further Interim Views published on 11 December 2015 which follow the second set of Examination Hearings held between 21 and 30 October 2015.

## **2.0 Recommendations**

- 2.1 That the Strategic Planning Board recommends to Council that the Proposed Changes to the Local Plan Strategy (Appendix 1) and the Sustainability (integrated) Appraisal and Habitats Regulation Assessment Addendums (Appendix 5) be approved for public consultation and submission to the Inspector.
- 2.2 That the Cabinet recommends to Council that the Proposed Changes to the Local Plan Strategy (Appendix 1) and the Sustainability (integrated) Appraisal and Habitats Regulation Assessment Addendums (Appendix 5) be approved for public consultation and submission to the Inspector.
- 2.3 That Council approves the Proposed Changes to the Local Plan Strategy (Appendix 1) and the Sustainability (integrated) Appraisal and Habitats Regulation Assessment Addendums (Appendix 5) for public consultation and submission to the Inspector.
- 2.4 That Council delegates to the Executive Director of Growth & Prosperity in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder, Party Group Leaders and the Chairman & Vice-Chairman of Strategic Planning Board authority to approve any further proposed changes to the Local Plan Strategy that may be necessary or appropriate following consultation.

## **3.0 Reasons for Recommendations**

- 3.1 The Local Plan Strategy document approved by Council on 28 February 2014 was submitted to the Secretary of State on 20 May 2014 and subject to Examination in September of that year. Following three weeks of hearings, the Examination hearings were adjourned in October 2014 and, on 6 November 2014, the Inspector published his Interim Views. In December 2014 the Examination was formally suspended to allow further work to be carried out on key areas of evidence to address the shortcomings in the soundness of the submitted Local Plan Strategy which the Inspector identified. That additional work was undertaken by 31 July 2015 and submitted to the Inspector to address and rectify his criticisms.
- 3.2 The Inspector held two weeks of additional hearings to consider this additional evidence between 21 and 30 October 2015. At the end of those hearings it was agreed with him that, subject to satisfactory Further Interim Views, the next step would be to prepare a consolidated document which incorporated all of the revisions suggested to date alongside new and amended strategic sites. This document would then be subject to full public consultation.
- 3.3 With the receipt of the Inspector's Further Interim Views on 11 December 2015, it is now appropriate to seek Council's authority to approve Proposed Changes to the Submitted Local Plan Strategy. These Proposed Changes will be subject to full public consultation for a period of six weeks.

- 3.4 The Proposed Changes to the submitted Local Plan Strategy have been supported by SA and HRA at appropriate stages. This included an assessment of suggested revisions to the Planning for Growth chapters at the end of July, followed by the consideration of suggested revisions to other policies (chapters 9-14 of the LPS) in September 2015. These documents are included in the examination library (RE B006 and RE B007 respectively). Furthermore, SA and HRA work has been undertaken to support the site selection methodology and its implementation. The outcomes of all of the SA and HRA work will be subject to full public consultation for a period of six weeks, alongside the proposed changes to the LPS.
- 3.5 Following the consultation, the Council will need to log, analyse and assess all of the comments made. Accordingly, it may be appropriate to make further changes to the Local Plan Strategy as a consequence of these representations, alongside changes to the SA and HRA. Thereafter the next step will be to send all of these responses and the Council's response to the Inspector. He will then hold further hearings to consider the soundness of the Proposed Changes – most notably the strategic sites, which have yet to be examined thus far.
- 3.6 The Secretary of State has signalled that he expects local planning authorities to make every effort to get a Local Plan in place by 2017. Consequently, it is clearly in the public interest to deal diligently yet expeditiously with the analysis of representations and any further proposed changes that might arise. Accordingly, it is recommended that Council delegates this responsibility to the Director of Growth & Prosperity to undertake this task, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, Leaders of Party Political Groups and the Chairman & Vice Chairman of Strategic Planning Board.

#### **4.0 Wards Affected**

- 4.1 All Wards

#### **5.0 Local Ward Members**

- 5.1 All Members

#### **6.0 Policy Implications**

- 6.1 The Local Plan is a key component of the Council's policy Framework. Whilst it will form the benchmark for considering planning applications it will also feed into numerous other agendas such as infrastructure, transport, economic development, recreation, public health, education and adult social care.

#### **7.0 Implications for Rural Communities**

- 7.1 The Local Plan Strategy provides a planning framework for all areas of the Borough outside the Peak District National Park. Consequently, it covers much of the rural area of the Borough in a geographic sense – but also it addresses numerous matters of importance to rural areas within its policies and provisions.

Importantly, the Local Plan Strategy will facilitate the drawing up of more detailed policies for rural areas, via either Site allocations or Neighbourhood Plans.

## **8.0 Financial Implications**

- 8.1 The cost of the Local Authority officers' time involved in the Local Plan is covered by the existing revenue budget for Planning & Sustainable Development. The Examination process prompts exceptional costs for which particular provision is made within the Planning Reserve budget.

## **9.0 Legal Implications**

- 9.1 The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, as amended, requires local planning authorities to prepare Local Plans. The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012, as amended, ("the Regulations") set out the procedures to be followed in the preparation of such Plans.
- 9.2 The Regulations do not specifically deal with consultation at the post-Submission stage and as such the conduct of the consultation is a matter for the Council's discretion. However, in order to ensure that the Proposed Changes are subject to the 'formal and unfettered' consultation referred to by the Local Plan Inspector (at paragraph 96 of his Further Interim Views), it will be conducted in a manner which is consistent with that required under Regulation 19, albeit that the Regulations do not strictly apply.
- 9.3 As the Regulations do not strictly apply, any responses received will not have the status of Regulation 20 representations and it will therefore be a matter for the Local Plan Inspector to determine who should appear at any further resumed examination hearings. The Council will, however, consider all consultation responses received prior to submitting the Proposed Changes and consultation responses to the Local Plan Inspector in due course

## **10.0 Risk Management**

- 10.1 An adopted Local Plan has many benefits for the Council, local communities and business. It provides certainty over future growth, infrastructure and a secure framework for investment. Accordingly delay in the planning process poses risks for the Council with potential uncertainty over the decision making framework continuing in the short term. To mitigate this, the Council has implemented rigorous project management to the preparation of the Local Plan – to ensure completion of the process within an open yet timely manner.

## **11.0 Background and Options**

### **The Context**

- 11.1 Following approval by Full Council in February 2014 the Council published its Local Plan Strategy in March 2014 and submitted the document to the Secretary

of State on 20 May 2014. In September 2014 hearings opened for the Examination of the Strategy.

- 11.2 Hearings continued for three weeks and proved unusually intensive in character. Hearings were adjourned on 3 October 2014 to allow for the consideration of a large volume of material linked to strategic sites. The Inspector used this period of adjournment to provide his interim views on the matters considered in the first 3 weeks of hearings.
- 11.3 The Inspector considered matters of legal compliance and soundness. Overall he identified several important shortcomings with the plan as submitted, whilst also agreeing that other key issues were satisfactory.
- 11.4 On 16 December 2014 the Inspector agreed to suspend the Examination pending the completion of further evidence on the following workstreams:
- Clarify and revise the Economic & housing strategies
  - Revise the calculation of Objectively assessed Need
  - Update the green belt assessment
  - Revise the spatial distribution of development.
- 11.5 The Council completed this work and submitted the updated evidence to the Inspector on 31 July 2015. On 14 August 2015 the local Plan Inspector agreed to lift the suspension of the examination and on 28 August 2015 set out a timetable for the re-commencement of hearings, starting on 6 October 2015.

### **Local Plan Strategy Policies – Suggested Revisions**

- 11.6 The updated evidence completed during the suspension of the Examination necessitated revisions to the main strategic policies relating to housing, economic growth, development and green belt. The wording of policies was amended to reflect the outcome of the new evidence. The key points included:
- Revisions to Reflect a revised Housing Requirement of 36,000 homes
  - Increased employment land requirement, to reflect the stronger anticipated jobs growth rate of 0.7% pa.
  - Revised Spatial Distribution of development, incorporating both the uplift in overall development and the need for additional growth in the northern towns.
  - Increase in the quantum of safeguarded land within green belt areas to 200 ha
  - Replacement of the new green belt between Crewe & Nantwich with a revised strategic green gap policy.

These revisions were endorsed by Cabinet at a meeting on 21 July 2015 and supported by SA and HRA addendum screening reports (PS E042 and PS E043 respectively).

- 11.7 At the Examination hearings held in the autumn of 2014, all policies aside from strategic sites were subject to scrutiny. The Inspector's Interim Views focused mainly on the principal strategic issues within Chapter 8 – namely housing and jobs growth, the distribution of development and green belt. The Policies of

Chapters 9-14 and the appendices were not covered in any great detail by the Inspector; instead he signalled that they did not raise such significant concerns. Furthermore, he considered that the policies could, for the most part, be satisfactorily amended by taking account of changes proposed and discussed at the examination hearings. The policies have therefore been amended accordingly and were endorsed at a meeting of the Cabinet Portfolio Holder on 24 September 2015 and supported by SA and HRA addendum reports (RE B006 and RE B007 respectively).

### **Inspector's Further Interim Views**

- 11.8 On 11 December, the Inspector issued his Further Interim Views in a detailed letter to the Council. Although the Inspector is careful to emphasise the interim nature of any conclusions, the letter is overwhelmingly supportive of the additional evidential work undertaken by the Council. The Inspector commented that *"there is no doubt that CEC has produced an impressive and comprehensive set of additional evidence within a relatively limited amount of time during the suspension of the examination"*. He also added that *"the additional evidence and studies produced during the suspension of the examination seem to have addressed most of the main concerns about the adequacy of the original evidence set out in my Interim Views"*.
- 11.9 However he also signalled that *"the nature, extent, content and conclusions of this additional evidence will have significant and wide-ranging implications for the submitted Local Plan Strategy"*. Furthermore, he stressed that any views given in his interim report *"are entirely without prejudice to my final conclusions on the soundness and legal compliance of the submitted or any amended Plan"*. Accordingly the endorsements he provides are by their nature, limited in scope – and they inevitably also prompt important changes to the Plan. Never the less, given the circumstances, the Further Interim Views are perhaps as positive as they are able to be at this juncture. The detailed conclusions and their implications for each area of policy are outlined below.
- 11.10 One of the Inspector's key concerns in 2014 was the alignment of economic and housing strategies. In particular, there was felt to be a lack of ambition in the employment growth forecast of 0.4%. This time around debate has focussed on whether a predicted employment rate of 0.7% was sufficiently robust – as opposed to other forecasts suggesting 0.9% jobs growth or higher. After considering all of the evidence, the Inspector concluded that the Council *"seems to have adopted a balanced and rational approach to economic and jobs growth, which is both ambitious and aspirational, yet realistic and with a reasonable prospect of success"*. The prediction of 0.7% employment growth therefore directly informs housing need. It should be noted that this level of job creation is predicated on significant increases in in-migration to the Borough.
- 11.11 The combination of new employment and additional migration points towards a need for a greater number of homes in the Borough. The additional evidence prepared by the Council looked at a wide range of factors – and included, for the first time, an allowance for older persons' accommodation within the overall total

need of 36,000 homes. The Inspector commented that the Council *“seems to have reached a reasonably balanced judgement about the relationship between new jobs and houses, which is supported by the evidence and would result in sustainable levels of migration and commuting and patterns of development, in line with the guidance in the NPPF and PPG”*

- 11.12 Having reviewed the need for housing, the Inspector went on to consider the ‘housing requirement’. This is a related but distinct exercise from the calculation of housing need; it requires that housing numbers are further refined in the light of other policy objectives. This may serve to elevate, or in some cases, suppress, the overall number of homes. The Inspector supported the principle of the housing requirement of matching the OAN of 36,000. However, he noted that delivery of 1800 homes per year would be *“challenging”* and that the detailed sites required had not yet been identified or examined.
- 11.13 In terms of Green Belt, the Council undertook a revised assessment which looked more comprehensively at Green Belt parcels around the main towns and local service centres. In particular, this involved a finer grain of assessment and consideration of urban regeneration and heritage issues. The Inspector commented that the updated assessment *“seems to reflect national policy and address most of the shortcomings of the previous Green Belt assessment. It provides a set of more comprehensive and proportionate evidence to inform, rather than determine, where the release of Green Belt land may be necessary at the site-selection stage”*
- 11.14 Associated to the Green Belt is the identification of safeguarded land – that is land that is taken out of the Green Belt now, but remains undeveloped so that it can meet development needs after 2030. National guidance on the approach to safeguarded land is fairly limited – and therefore the Council had to adopt its own methodology to derive an overall safeguarded requirement for 200Ha of land. Notwithstanding these uncertainties, the Inspector considered that the Authority had *“taken a balanced and cautious approach to the issue of Safeguarded Land, which seems logical, rational, effective and justified by the supporting evidence”*.
- 11.15 Turning then to the spatial distribution of development, the Council commissioned consultants AECOM to re-assess the pattern of growth across the Borough. This work drew on the Urban Potential, Edge of Settlement and Green Belt studies undertaken by the Council, plus a wide range of other influences and factors. The Spatial Distribution Update Report grappled with the contentious issue of the balance of development between the north and south of the Borough. Overall the Inspector was satisfied that the additional evidence seemed to represent *“a realistic, rational and soundly-based starting point for the spatial distribution of development;”*. However, he was also careful to record that he could not firmly endorse the revised distribution of development until site specific matters had been concluded.
- 11.16 The Inspector acknowledged the SA and HRA undertaken to support the proposed changes to the LPS. The iterative and ongoing nature of both SA and HRA was noted alongside a suggestion that the Council should consider the jobs growth rate of 0.9% as a reasonable alternative for Plan making purposes. The Council's

independent consultants have now undertaken this appraisal and this, alongside the outcomes of all the SA and HRA work will now be subject to public consultation, alongside the proposed changes to the LPS.

- 11.17 The Inspector also considered other related matters in his Interim views – such as the additional highway studies undertaken by the Council. These include the Impact of Spatial Distribution of Development on Cross-boundary Highway Networks, the Local Plan Strategic Highways Assessment, the North Crewe VISSIM, and the Alsager Highway Study. The Inspector was broadly content with the scope and findings of these studies, however he expressed disappointment that differences remained between the Cheshire East and Stockport Councils. Since the conclusion of the Examination further meetings have been held between the authorities and a revised Memorandum of Understanding is being drawn up between the Councils.
- 11.18 Finally, the Inspector commented briefly on green gaps. Although this is a long standing policy in successive local plans around Crewe, in the Local Plan Strategy strategic green gaps replace the previous proposal for a green belt between Crewe & Nantwich. Accordingly the Inspector was circumspect in his comments, preferring to reserve judgement until the revised policy has been subject to consultation. Never the less, the separation of Crewe & Nantwich remains a fundamental spatial objective of the plan – and a principle that remains threatened by numerous development proposals in this vicinity. Consequently the amended policy will now be subject to consultation and the Council will further pursue the issue through the later stages of the Examination.

### **Site Selection Process**

- 11.19 The Council published a Site Selection Methodology in July 2015 and subsequently elaborated on its contents within the hearing statements prepared for the Examination in October 2015. This has now been consolidated into a revised approach which is summarised in the diagram at Appendix 2. The full Selection methodology is set out within the supporting documents at Appendix 6. Sites are selected to meet the development requirements in each Principal Town and Key Service Centre. These requirements, together with current commitments (to 30 September 2015) are set out in the Table in Appendix 3.
- 11.20 The Methodology looks comprehensively at the factors that influence the suitability of land for development. This includes a combination of economic, environmental and social factors. The Inspector commented that *The SSM formalises the site-selection process and, subject to further detail about the later stages of the process, seems to represent a reasonably consistent, objective and comprehensive methodology to identify and select strategic and other site allocations without retro-fitting the evidence. As such, this evidence seems to be appropriate, consistent, objective, comprehensive, justified and effective, providing a soundly based framework of evidence for identifying and selecting strategic and other site allocations, in line with the guidance in the NPPF and PPG.*
- 11.21 An important component of the Methodology is that it is applied to ALL sites in the Plan – both those that were allocated in the 2014 Submission document and new



or amended sites that may be required now to meet the uplift in development across the Borough. The revised evidence gathered through the suspension of the Examination could clearly impact on the relative merits of any given site; consequently, it is important that every site is reviewed and assessed in a consistent manner, based on the latest available evidence.

- 11.21 Having established a clear methodology, the next step is then to apply that to the choice of sites across the main settlements. The objective will be to try and identify a suitable selection of sites so that the requirements of the spatial distribution is fulfilled. It should be noted that the Inspector indicated that the distribution could not be fully endorsed until the final site selection is made. Consequently, the distribution should not be met 'at any price' – rather it is viewed as the optimum distribution to be met if possible. If it were to be found that in attempting to meet the distribution, the Council had to rely on unsuitable sites with significant adverse impacts, then it might have been appropriate to revisit the overall balance of growth
- 11.22 Having now completed the detailed assessment of site, this situation does not arise. The Council is confident that the spatial distribution considered and endorsed by the Inspector can be met without undermining the principles of sustainable development. The distribution established in the AECOM report took account of the very detailed Edge of Settlement Analysis and Urban Potential work which suggested that the proposed distribution was realistic and achievable. The further comprehensive site assessment of individual sites has since confirmed this is the case. Accordingly, the selection of sites follows the distribution endorsed by the Council's Cabinet in July 2015 and subsequently supported in principle by the Inspector in December 2015.
- 11.23 A 'Town Report' has been prepared for each of the Principal Towns and Key Service Centres (see Appendix 6). These make a comparative evaluation of all potential strategic sites in each settlement – carefully considering their respective planning merits and fully informed by the outcomes of the HRA and SA. This analysis then leads to a recommended selection of sites for inclusion in the Local Plan Strategy. A summary of the findings of the reports is attached as Appendix 4.

### **Safeguarded Land**

- 11.24 Paragraph 85 of the NPPF advocates the designation of safeguarded land to avoid the need for regular re-drawing of green belt boundaries. The Inspector endorsed the principle of providing such land and the overall quantum of around 200Ha across the north of the Borough. Since then further work has been carried out on distributing the 200ha of Safeguarded Land between the settlements inset within the North Cheshire Green Belt.
- 11.25 Firstly, Safeguarded Land has been distributed proportionately by settlement, based on the Revised Spatial Distribution of Development. This Revised Spatial Distribution of Development allows for some of the development needs of the northern towns to be met by the North Cheshire Growth Village during this plan period (up to 2030). This approach may not continue post 2030 so the distribution of Safeguarded Land to Handforth is based on its proportion of population

instead. The remaining amount of Safeguarded Land (the difference between Handforth's share based on population and its share based on the Revised Spatial Distribution of Development) has then been re-distributed proportionately to the Principal Town and Key Service Centres inset within the North Cheshire Green Belt.

- 11.26 This results in Safeguarded Land being required in Macclesfield (95 ha), Handforth (10 ha), Knutsford (28 ha), Poynton (19 ha), Wilmslow (24 ha) and North Cheshire Green Belt Local Service Centres (24 ha). Having undertaken this exercise, the green belt boundary in the north of Cheshire East should not now need changing until at least 2045.

### **Deliverability and Five Year Supply.**

- 11.27 Facilitating the delivery of housing is one of the key roles of the Local Plan. The NPPF advises councils *"to ensure that their Local Plan meets the full, objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing in the housing market area"*. This objective is subject to the proviso that meeting housing need is consistent with the policies set out in the Framework. There is also a need to identify key sites which are critical to the delivery of the housing strategy over the plan period.
- 11.28 To ensure that there is every prospect that identified housing need is met and the requisite number of homes are actually built at the end of the Plan period, it is normally considered prudent to allocate sufficient sites to slightly exceed the housing requirement. This approach was taken in the submitted plan – and it is proposed to continue this within the Proposed Changes.
- 11.29 Paragraph 47 of the NPPF also advises Councils to identify sufficient land annually to meet a 5-year supply of deliverable sites against their housing requirement. The NPPG similarly advises that *"local planning authorities should have an identified five-year housing supply at all points during the plan period."* Consequently the Local Plan must be able to show a 5-year supply of land – and has the means to do this through the allocation of sufficient housing sites. Five-year supply is a critical determining factor in the consideration of planning applications involving housing.
- 11.30 The challenge facing the Council is the fact that we are already 5½ years into the plan period. Over this time the housing requirement has increased significantly from 1,150 homes pa as set out in the (now defunct) Regional Spatial Strategy, through to the 1,350pa in the submitted plan and the 1,800 homes pa now proposed. Unsurprisingly, especially with the after effects of recession, the Borough has not built the 9,000 homes needed in the first five years of the plan period – and in fact faces a backlog equivalent to over three years' housing requirement.
- 11.31 The PPG advises that Local Planning Authorities should aim to deal with any undersupply within the first 5 years of the plan period *"where possible"*. Where this cannot be met, the advice is to work with neighbouring authorities under the duty to cooperate. This latter approach is not an option since no adjoining

Council can take any of the Borough's housing. Consequently, the Council should seek to recover the backlog within its own means, so far as that remains consistent with the Inspector's views and the policies of Framework.

- 11.32 It is therefore proposed to allocate additional land in each settlement to boost housing supply. Deliverability is also a consideration in site selection and the Plan contains a mix of (generally smaller) sites that deliver quickly and those that bring strategic benefits (sometimes over a longer period). The Council has consulted with home builders over the appropriate lead in times and build rates to employ. By taking a reasoned and proportionate approach, this means that most sites will only yield a relatively modest proportion of the homes within 5 years.
- 11.33 It is apparent therefore that to catch up the whole of the backlog within 5 years will require the allocation of sites significantly in excess of the Spatial Distribution considered by the Inspector. It would also require significantly more Green Belt release – not least because Green Belt often coincides with the highest housing demand and highest likely delivery. The Inspector has recognised the issue of backlog as *“a challenging situation”* given past and current build rates. He also added though that *“clearly CEC will have to set out the specific reasons if it wishes to depart from the normal 5-year time period of meeting any backlog”*.
- 11.34 The significant deviation from the spatial distribution and the impact on the Green Belt are considered to constitute those specific reasons. Accordingly, it is proposed that the plan takes a 'half-way approach' between 'Sedgefield' (5 years) and 'Liverpool' (15 years). The Cheshire East approach is therefore to recover backlog within 8 years - and to adopt the 20% buffer employing the PAS guidance, as recommended by the Inspector. The full details of housing supply issues are set out in the Housing Supply Topic Paper.

## **12.0 Summary of Site Specific Recommendations**

- 12.1 This section summarises the recommended selection of sites in each town. Although a comparison is made with the submitted plan is made for ease of reference, all sites have been assessed on the same equal basis. A table of the recommended sites is found at Appendix A and B of the attached Local Plan document (Appendix 1 of this report)

### *Principal Towns – Crewe*

- 12.2 The Spatial Distribution proposes that 7,700 homes be provided in Crewe along with 65 ha of Employment land (an increase from 7,000 homes in the submitted plan). As at 30 September 2015, there had been 890 net housing completions within the plan period and commitments totalled 1,857 units.
- 12.3 It is proposed to allocate 400 homes to the strategic location in central Crewe – effectively capturing redevelopment opportunities within the main urban area. There then follow a series of allocations on the periphery of the town. Basford East & Basford West are maintained as mixed housing and employment allocations, with 370 dwellings at Basford West and the housing numbers reduced to 850

homes at Basford East to take account of more recent information. The allocation at Leighton West is maintained and the previous Leighton Strategic Location is replaced by a new allocation of 500 homes located adjacent to the current Parkers Road housing scheme.

- 12.4 The boundaries of the housing allocation at Sydney Road are amended to reflect updated ownership information – and a new second phase is proposed, capable of accommodating around 275 homes. To the North West, a new allocation is now proposed off Broughton Road for 175 homes, part of which already has planning permission. Meanwhile the housing allocation at Crewe Green is maintained – providing for around 150 homes.
- 12.5 To the south of Crewe it is proposed to maintain the allocation at South Cheshire Growth village, but to reduce the likely capacity to around 650 homes – to reflect updated information on heritage and landscape matters. The allocations at East Shavington (275 dwellings) and the Triangle both now have planning permission. However it is proposed to increase the capacity of the latter to 400 homes in recognition of the opportunity for a more effective use of the site.
- 12.6 In terms of employment land, provision for 24 ha will be made at Basford East and a further 22ha at Basford West. The site at Leighton West will include a further 5ha of land for business.

#### *Principal Towns - Macclesfield*

- 12.7 The Spatial Distribution proposes that 4,250 homes be provided in Macclesfield along with 20 ha of Employment land (an increase from 3,500 homes and 15 ha in the submitted plan). As at 30 September 2015, there had been 512 net housing completions within the plan period and commitments totalled 847 units.
- 12.8 It is proposed to allocate 500 homes within the Central Macclesfield Strategic location, effectively capturing redevelopment opportunities within the main urban area. It is then proposed to maintain South Macclesfield as a major site for mixed use development. This area represents the only significant undeveloped land outside of the Green Belt within the Macclesfield area. The capacity of the site has been re-appraised, but remains as before at 1,050 homes / 5 ha employment.
- 12.9 The remainder of development needs can only be accommodated by taking land out of the Green Belt. It is proposed to identify South West Macclesfield as the main area for future growth and development in the town. It is proposed to allocate 300 homes and 10 ha of Employment Land at Congleton Road and a further 200 homes south of Chelford Road. Each site will require a new access suitable of accommodating a new distributor road. Whilst not a bypass as such, this road will be a principal route through the urban area capable in due course of linking Chelford Road and Congleton Road. The greater part of South West Macclesfield (around 103 ha) will not be available for development in the plan period but rather safeguarded for construction after 2030. Accordingly, the new through route would only be completed after the current plan period.

- 12.10 In addition to this, it is proposed to allocate three further sites around the periphery of the town. Land at Fence Avenue is proposed for allocation, as before, and could accommodate some 250 homes, linked to the potential relocation of Kings School. Land at Gaw End Lane is also proposed for the development of around 300 homes – an increase on the previous proposal. Finally, a new development site is proposed at Chelford Road / Whirley Road which will enable the construction of around 150 homes.

### *The Key Service Centres*

#### *Alsager*

- 12.11 The Spatial Distribution proposes that 2,000 homes be provided in Alsager along with 40 ha of Employment land (an increase from 1,600 homes and 35 ha in the submitted plan). As at 30 September 2015, there had been 98 net housing completions within the plan period and commitments totalled 530 units. It is proposed to once again allocate the major brownfield site at the former MMU campus – capable of accommodating around 400 new homes, alongside the retention of key sporting facilities. The large Brownfield site at Twyfords / Cardway is also proposed for allocation – with capacity for around 550 units. Finally, the site at White Moss Quarry is once again proposed for allocation – the site already has planning consent for 350 homes.

- 12.12 In terms of employment land, it is proposed once again to support the redevelopment of areas within the existing Radway Green site. Alongside this a new allocation of some 12 ha is proposed to the north to allow for localised business expansion. To the south it is also proposed to remove 25 ha of land from the green belt for larger scale expansion. The exceptional circumstances for this allocation rest on the specific characteristics of this site – the potential for large footprint development, the opportunity to improve the access of the existing Radway Green site and the chance to reach an improved M6 Junction 16 without crossing the railway line.

#### *Congleton*

- 12.13 The Spatial Distribution proposes that 4,150 homes be provided in Congleton along with 24 ha of Employment land (an increase from 3500 homes in the submitted plan). As at 30 September 2015, there had been 610 net housing completions within the plan period and commitments totalled 1,122 units. More recently developments have since been resolved to approved or granted consent on large sites at Tall Ash Farm and Lamberts Lane.
- 12.14 The significant feature of development in Congleton remains the proposal for a link road across the north of the town allied to significant new development. Since the publication of the Submission Plan the route of the road has been consulted upon and is now the subject of a planning application. This provides the greater certainty to translate the previous strategic locations into clearly defined strategic sites. These provide firm allocations for housing, employment, commercial and recreational uses.

12.15 The strategic site at Back Lane is expected to yield around 750 homes, spread across several parcels, combined with just over 7ha of employment land and related community uses. The extension to Congleton business park will deliver at least 15 ha of employment land and around 625 homes once completed. When combined with existing commitments of 3.8ha these two sites will fulfil the future employment needs of the town. Further to the east, strategic sites are maintained at Giantswood Lane (around 650 homes) and Manchester Road (450 homes).

#### *Handforth*

12.16 The Spatial Distribution proposes that 2,200 homes be provided in Handforth along with 22 ha of Employment land. As at 30 September 2015, there had been 63 net housing completions within the plan period and commitments totalled 322 units. Employment land Commitments total nearly 10Ha.

12.17 The Council has re-assessed the merits of providing a large-scale stand-alone development in Handforth. NPPF advice at paragraph 52 suggests that new settlements may provide the best way of achieving sustainable development. It is the principles of sustainable development that underpin the continued case for the North Cheshire Growth Village. By planning comprehensively, it is possible to better mitigate the impact of new development and address local infrastructure issues. Accordingly it is proposed to maintain the allocation of some 1650 homes, plus up to 12 ha of employment land.

12.18 In addition, a further new site is proposed west of the town. Land at Sagars Road is recommended for allocation – and it is capable of accommodating around 250 homes. 14ha of land south of the Growth Village is also proposed for safeguarding – for development after 2030.

#### *Knutsford*

12.19 The Spatial Distribution proposes that 950 homes be provided in Knutsford along with 15 ha of Employment land (an increase from 650 homes and 10Ha in the submitted plan). As at 30 September 2015, there had been 25 net housing completions within the plan period and commitments totalled 50 units.

12.20 Knutsford has a variety of development options around the town. Factors including green belt, transport, landscape and heritage have featured in the site assessments. Land at Parkgate forms the only sizeable area outside of the green belt – and has planning permission for 200 homes. In addition, it is proposed to allocate 500 homes on three parcels on the North west side of Knutsford – around 250 homes east of Manchester Road and 175 homes on Northwich Road. A further 75 homes and 7.5 ha of employment land is proposed on the western side of Manchester Road.

12.21 It is further proposed to allocate 150 homes on land south of Longridge. The remainder of this area will be safeguarded for future development. Additional safeguarded land will be provided in North West Knutsford (22ha) and adjacent to Booths Hall (8.7ha).

### *Middlewich*

- 12.22 The Spatial Distribution proposes that 1950 homes be provided in Middlewich along with 75 ha of Employment land (an increase from 1,600 homes in the submitted plan). As at 30 September 2015, there had been 335 net housing completions within the plan period and commitments totalled 352 units
- 12.23 It is proposed to retain the allocation at Glebe Farm to the south of the town; this will accommodate around 525 new homes and affords the opportunity to link Warmingham Lane with the main A533 Booth Lane. This will be supplemented by a new allocation for around 225 homes to the west of Warmingham Lane. This will adjoin recently approved development to the north and east.
- 12.24 It is also proposed to retain the strategic location at Brooks Lane as an area of mixed development including around 400 homes. This site has potential to capitalise on the adjoining canal, but will require the relocation of a number of existing businesses. To the East of Middlewich, it is recommended that the significant employment area at Midpoint 18 be retained and expanded. It is anticipated that some 75 ha will be developed within the plan period – but with further phases available for after 2030. This area has potential access to the railway line as well as good links to Junction 18. It will also incorporate the route of the Eastern Bypass.

### *Nantwich*

- 12.25 The Spatial Distribution proposes that 2,050 homes be provided in Nantwich along with 3 ha of Employment land (an increase from 1,900 homes in the submitted plan). As at 30 September 2015, there had been 394 net housing completions within the plan period and commitments totalled 687 units.
- 12.26 It is proposed once again to allocate significant development on land at Kingsley Fields, to the North West of the town. This area will provide for around 1,100 new homes, new employment and community facilities. Outline Planning permission was granted for the site in January 2016 and a reserved matters application is now being prepared. A further strategic site is located at Snow Hill, identified for mixed use development.

### *Poynton*

- 12.27 The Spatial Distribution proposes that 650 homes be provided in Poynton along with 10 ha of Employment land (an increase from 200 homes and 3 ha of Employment in the submitted plan). As at 30 September 2015, there had been no net additions to the housing stock within the plan period. This unusual situation is brought about by primarily by the demolition of sub-standard flats in the village and a corresponding very low level of house building. Housing commitments totalled 39 units.
- 12.28 In the Submission Local Plan Strategy no Strategic Sites were proposed in Poynton. It is now recommended that three small sites be allocated on the edge of the village; each will require a revision to the green belt boundary. It is proposed to

allocate land at Sprink Farm on Dickens Lane for around 150 homes, this site is closely related to the existing built up area and near to the High school. Land off Hazelbadge Road is also proposed for around 150 homes. This site is very close to the Station and town centre. It also adjoins Lower Park Primary school, and accordingly improvements to parking, turning and access are integral to the scheme.

- 12.29 The final residential site is land off Chester Road. This area is located on the western edge of Poynton and particular care will be required to avoid coalescence with housing in Stockport. The site is closely defined by existing buildings and other features; it is near to Lostock Hall Primary School, but just over a mile from the town centre. It will accommodate approximately 150 houses
- 12.30 The planned construction of the Poynton Relief Road provides the opportunity to expand Adlington Industrial Estate. Land east of the current employment area is no longer required for the route and can now be allocated, for business use, whilst land to the south and west, between the current buildings and new road alignment is also earmarked for development. In all this accounts for 10Ha of new business land. To the north, between the village and the relief road it is proposed to allocate 20 ha of safeguarded land for future development. This is located at the eastern end of the former airfield.

### *Sandbach*

- 12.31 The Spatial Distribution proposes that 2,750 homes be provided in Sandbach along with 20 ha of Employment land (an increase from 2,200 homes in the submitted plan). As at 30 September 2015, there had been 624 net housing completions within the plan period and commitments totalled 1,877 units. Sandbach more than any other town has a significant proportion of its development already approved across a variety of sites on the edge of town.
- 12.32 It is proposed to maintain the Strategic Site known as Capricorn off Old Mill Road. This will provide for 20 ha of new employment land and 450 homes. The housing is specifically intended to support the development of land for business through the provision of new infrastructure, particularly a bridge through the wildlife corridor. Some 300 homes and about 4 ha of business space already have consent on the site.

### *Wilmslow*

- 12.33 The Spatial Distribution proposes that 900 homes be provided in Wilmslow along with 10 ha of Employment land (an increase from 400 homes and 8 ha in the submitted plan). As at 30 September 2015, there had been 87 net housing completions within the plan period and commitments totalled 312 units.
- 12.34 The one area of safeguarded land from previous Local Plans (land at Adlington Road) has now obtained consent and is under construction. Therefore to meet future needs additional allocations are proposed, all of which require amendment of the Green Belt boundary. It is proposed to maintain the allocation at Royal London for mixed use but to include land west of Alderley Road within the



developable area. This will now provide for around 175 homes and 5 ha of employment land.

- 12.35 Further housing allocations are now proposed at Little Staneylands and Heathfield Farm. The former will accommodate around 150 homes on land off Stanneylands Road, situated adjacent to the Dean Valley. This site is located close to existing facilities and provides the opportunity for improved public access to open land along the valley. Heathfield Farm at Dean Row Road is located on the eastern edge of the town and can accommodate around 150 homes. It will be accessed by the existing large roundabout. The remainder of this land; extending to some 9 ha towards Cross Lane will be safeguarded for future development after the end of the plan period.
- 12.36 A further area of safeguarded Land is proposed between Upcast Lane and Cumber Lane. This extends to approximately 15 ha and is closely related to the urban area on the south western side of Macclesfield. Finally, it is proposed once again to allocate land west of the A34 close to Wilmslow High School for employment use. This will provide business space in a prominent location with good rail and road connections.

#### *Other Development*

- 12.37 Economic Prosperity is a key objective of the Plan – whilst the increased housing requirement follows directly from a revised employment growth projection of 0.7% pa. Accordingly, it is important that the Local Plan Strategy makes suitable provision for economic development.
- 12.38 The plan therefore contains three distinct stand alone proposals linked to current and future employment opportunities. Each are very much derived from the site specific circumstances at each location.
- 12.39 It is proposed to once again allocate land at Wardle for employment purposes. This former airfield already includes a variety of industries – and further land will consolidate and improve this as a business location. Meanwhile at Alderley Park it is recommended that the particular opportunities at this site be continue to be recognised in the Plan. The site will remain in the Green Belt, but revisions are proposed to the site policy which take account of the Alderley Park Development Framework and recognise the redevelopment opportunities for both employment and supporting housing, having regard to the exceptional qualities of the site.
- 12.40 Alderley Park exemplifies the type of site which collectively form the north Cheshire Science Corridor. This grouping of specialist technology and science orientated business sites are a vital component of the local and regional economy. Looking to the future, it's important that sites are available to maintain growth within this sector. The construction of the new A556 route between the M6 and M56 presents a site specific opportunity for land to be reserved for this future development. Land known as the Cheshire Gateway, ringed by the new road at its junction with the M56 is entirely contained by the new infrastructure and has potential to form a specialist science and technology park. The site specific characteristics of this site are considered to create the Exceptional circumstances

necessary to justify removing 9ha of land from the green belt and reserving it as safeguarded land.

- 12.41 Aside from those above, Strategic Sites are not identified at this stage within Local Service Centres or the villages and rural areas. Sites for development, plus safeguarded land (in Green Belt areas, where necessary) will be allocated in the second part of the Local Plan. It is however proposed in the Local plan strategy that the scale of development be increased in these areas. Local Service Centres will accommodate 3,500 homes and Other Settlements / Rural Areas will accommodate 2,950 homes (an increase from 2,500 and 2,000 respectively).

### **13.0 Next Steps**

- 13.1 Once approved, it is recommended that the 'Cheshire East Council Proposed Changes to the Local Plan Strategy' be subject to full public consultation for a period of six weeks. This is provisionally set between 4 March and 19 April 2016, depending on the decision made on 26 February 2016.
- 13.2 All responses received will then be logged and assessed following the close of consultation. Once analysed, consideration will be given as to the need for further proposed changes to be made to the Local Plan Strategy as a consequence of the representations made. After this assessment is complete, all consultation responses, together with the Proposed Changes will be submitted to the Local Plan Inspector, Mr Stephen Pratt. It is then anticipated that the Examination Hearings will resume in September 2016.
- 13.3 Given the need to make timely progress with the Local Plan Strategy, it is not proposed to refer any further proposed changes to a meeting of Council at this stage. It is suggested that the decision on this matter be delegated to the Executive Director of Growth & Prosperity in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, party leaders and the Chairman and Vice Chairman of Strategic Planning Board. On that basis, Council will next consider the Local Plan Strategy following receipt of the Inspector's Final Examination Report.

### **14.0 Access to Information**

- 14.0 The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writers:

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**Appendix 1 – Proposed Changes to the Local Plan Strategy February 2016**

**Appendix 2 – Site Selection Methodology Summary**

**Appendix 3 – Table of Housing and Employment Requirements & Commitments**

**Appendix 4 – Town Reports – summary of site recommendations**

**Appendix 5 – The Habitats Regulations Assessment and Sustainability (Integrated)  
Appraisal Addendums:**

<http://cheshireeast-consult.limehouse.co.uk/portal/planning/cs/hs/sahra>

**Appendix 6 – Supporting Documents:**

Documents providing context and support for this report are uploaded here:

<http://cheshireeast-consult.limehouse.co.uk/portal/planning/cs/hs/reports>

Further Evidence and Documentation is uploaded in the Examination Library:

<http://cheshireeast-consult.limehouse.co.uk/portal/planning/cs/library>