

REPORT TO PLANNING AND LICENSING COMMITTEE

COMMUNITY GROUP PLANNING DETERMINANTS



Report Reference PL-22-01
Meeting Date 16th May 2022
Agenda Item 9
Prepared by Planning and Facilities Officer

1.0 BACKGROUND

Following participation by the Combined Community Groups¹ in the Site Allocations Development Policies Document Examination, a meeting was arranged with Cheshire East Officers in order to understand the next steps before Cheshire East Council's adoption of the SADPD.

Cheshire East Council confirmed that the six-week SADPD consultation would only be on the draft of the Main Modifications (MMs) required by the Inspector to make SADPD sound and legally compliant. It would not be of the whole revised document. The Inspector would consider representations received on the SADPD MMs, conclude the Examination, and submit his final report to CEC.

The consultation on the Schedule of Proposed Main Modifications and the Schedule of Policies Map Modifications runs until 5pm on Tuesday 31 May.

The consultation documents can be viewed by clicking the links below:

[Schedule of Proposed Main Modifications](#)

[Schedule of Policy Map Modifications](#)

2.0 COMMUNITY GROUP INPUT

The Community Groups suggested ten determinants which identify factors likely to determine the planning of Knutsford's future development as part of a paper. The Determinants are included in the index below.

Community Groups suggested that the determinants could be usefully included in a revised Knutsford Neighbourhood Plan and whether the revision should be undertaken now. CEC responded that it would be valuable to incorporate the suggested determinants in the neighbourhood plan in due course however the neighbourhood plan had only been made in 2019 and its policies had not lost their relevance. CEC advised that Knutsford would no longer benefit from current 'saved' Macclesfield Local Plan Policies, that the SADPD was not yet operational but includes policies that replace MLP policies (such as those related to design). It was suggested that the neighbourhood plan performance be monitored in relation to SADPD policies in action before any revision of the neighbourhood plan. Cheshire East Council also advised that the most effective immediate course of action lay in updating the Conservation Area Appraisals, which is already in progress.

¹ Nether Ward Community Group, North Knutsford Community Group, South-East Knutsford Residents Association and South Knutsford Residents Group

3.0 THE PLANNING DETERMINANTS

1. PLANNING INSPECTOR'S 20TH JUNE 2017 REPORT

The Planning Inspector's 20 June 2017 report on the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy (LPS) Examination refers at paragraph 236 to "moderating factors determining the LPS allocation of new homes and new employment land to Knutsford" (respectively, 950 homes but increased to 1,003 in the adopted LPS, and 15ha of employment land).

The Inspector comments (emphasis added):

This [intended allocation of 950 homes and 15 ha employment land] is somewhat less than that which might be expected on a proportionate [ie population] basis, **due to Green Belt constraints and potential effects on biodiversity and local highways.**

Those factors are relevant today to Knutsford (points 2, 4 and 5, below). Moreover, the paragraph 235 description is also of continuing relevance, Knutsford being "**an historic market town**" of "**distinctive character**" and of a "**size and function as a Key Service Centre and good location in terms of strategic transport networks.**" (Points 6 and 7, below.)

2. THE GREEN BELT

The Green Belt is a constraint on development in and around Knutsford, with significant exceptions of Local Plan Strategic Sites totalling 80.92 haⁱ and 30.7 ha of Safeguarded Land. Green Belt land in and around Knutsford is of high landscape value and good agricultural quality. Adopted on 27 July 2017, the LPS removed approximately 95.4 ha from the Green Belt around Knutsfordⁱⁱ.

3. SAFEGUARDED LAND

Knutsford's Safeguarded Land is more than that at any other Key Service Centre. It would theoretically provide for some 921 - 1,228 new homes if that land were to be allocated in future solely for residential development (assuming 30 - 40 dwellings per hectareⁱⁱⁱ).

The LPS states that, if Safeguarded Land is required for development [other than for Open Countryside purposes], its use (if justified by an assessment of need and review of the Local Plan) will help to ensure Green Belt boundaries will not require review at the end of the Plan period in 2030^{iv}.

The LPS further states that CEC's identification of Safeguarded Land ensures Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered in the next Plan period post-2030^v.

4. BIODIVERSITY AT AND NEAR KNUTSFORD

This includes core areas of rare or important habitats and protected wildlife sites as part of Cheshire East's ecological network. Knutsford is located in the largest area in Cheshire East of meres and mosses catchments (buffer zones)^{vi}. Biodiversity is recognised as an increasingly important issue^{vii}.

5. TATTON PARK

Adjacent to Knutsford is Tatton Park, a Grade 2* Registered Park and Garden with 26 listed buildings. Tatton Park is one of the UK's most complete historic estates. It attracted over 800,000 visits per annum, pre-pandemic. Highway infrastructure limitations are in part caused by its 1,000 ha, the extent and location of which limit permanently the traffic management options for Knutsford.

6. KNUTSFORD'S DISTINCTIVE CHARACTER

Knutsford's distinctive character is retained as an historic market town, with some of Cheshire East's most significant built, natural and cultural heritage.

7. SUSTAINABILITY

Knutsford functions well as a sustainable settlement and will do so more effectively once planned infrastructure improvements are completed.

It has 75.6% commuting into the town and 57.9% commuting out of it^{viii}, reflecting Knutsford's number of jobs and good strategic transport links (proximity to M6 and M56 motorway junctions and with a station on the Manchester-Chester railway line).

Cheshire East's designated key employment areas include Booths Hall, Knutsford and Radbroke Hall, Knutsford. The town centre has a wide range of private and public sector jobs, including in offices, retailing, hospitality, leisure, education and the health sector. Other Knutsford employment locations are the Parkgate Industrial Estate and Trading Estates at Longridge and Stanley Road. LPS Strategic Sites in Knutsford include employment locations at land west of Manchester Road (part allocated for a business park) and east of Manchester Road (part proposed for retailing and health uses).

Knutsford town centre has a good retail offer serving a range of disposable incomes, with five convenience goods stores (Booths, Waitrose, Sainsbury's, Co-op and Aldi), individual shops and several high street multiples (including Boots the Chemist, Boots Opticians, WH Smith and Waterstones). Knutsford's evening economy has weathered the pandemic, with many restaurants, pubs and a cinema.

8. HOUSING MARKET AREA

Knutsford and Northwich share the same Housing Market Area (in reality, if not currently in Planning policy). Knutsford and Northwich town centres are only six miles apart and are linked by road and rail, with only two intervening railway stations. Northwich is identified in CWAC's Local Plan as a key focus for development, with regeneration potential and no need to release Green Belt land.

9. URBAN POTENTIAL

Knutsford has notable urban potential at brownfield locations

- at town centre car parks owned by CEC, as recognised in Knutsford Neighbourhood Plan (mixed-use development including apartments, retail, offices or workshops (potentially live-work space), as well as car parks)
- Knutsford's residential potential of Living Over the Shop [LOTS] and pandemic conversions of town centre properties from commercial to residential use

- residential potential of expected surplus land at Knutsford Community Hospital (the CCG's preferred site for a Knutsford Health Centre) and three expected surplus GPs' surgeries
- Kings Coffee House, owned by Knutsford Town Council, vacant with potential future uses including a Knutsford Visitor and Heritage Centre, and community facilities
- and Knutsford Leisure Centre, with potential for improved leisure facilities.

10. AIRCRAFT NOISE

Noise from aircraft arriving at, and departing from, Manchester Airport affects the potential deliverability of development sites in NE Knutsford^{ix}. Uniquely as a Cheshire East KSC, Knutsford is recognised as being affected adversely by aircraft noise^x.

4.0 DECISIONS REQUIRED

It is recommended that the committee:

- a) Notes the guidance from Cheshire East Council that it would be premature to undertake a review of the Knutsford Neighbourhood Plan at this stage
- b) Notes the planning determinants prepared by the Combined Community Groups

ⁱ Derived from planning applications, comprising:

LPS 36A: 15.65 ha - 17/3853M, LPS 36B: 10.7 ha - 19/0032M, LPS 36C: 22.07 ha - 18/3672M, LPS 37 (residential use): 16.22 ha - 13/2935M, and LPS 38: 16.28 ha - 21/3100M. NB LPS 37 was not Green Belt land.

The 80.92 ha excludes 6.4 ha at LPS 37, now built out for employment uses.

ⁱⁱ Since LPS adoption, additional land has been removed from the Green Belt for highways provision to Strategic Sites LPS 36A and LPS 37. (Pre-LPS adoption, LPS 37 was outside the Green Belt.)

ⁱⁱⁱ Range of density at LPS paragraph 8.57. Safeguarded Land is defined as Open Countryside and its development is not permitted for uses other than those in the Open Countryside, unless resulting from outcomes of a Local Plan review. Safeguarded Land has no allocation of land use other than as Open Countryside.

^{iv} LPS Policy PG4 Safeguarded Land (Point 4) and LPS paragraph 8.58.

^v LPS paragraph 8.57.

^{vi} Revised Publication Draft SADPD paragraph 4.6 and Figure 4.1.

^{vii} For example, 'The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review'. February 2021, at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/final-report-the-economics-of-biodiversity-the-dasgupta-review>

^{viii} Figures from 2015 may need updating. They are sourced from CEC background evidence for its LPS.

^{ix} An issue at the 2021 SADPD Examination and in Development Management consideration. Case 13/2935M was granted planning permission on 23 June 2015 for residential development of land north of Parkgate Industrial Estate, which (following LPS adoption) became part of Strategic Site LPS 37 Parkgate Extension. On 5 March 2014 CEC's Strategic Planning Board had agreed CEC's Officer's recommendation to approve the application, notwithstanding CEC's Environmental Health Team's recommended refusal on grounds of significant adverse noise impacts on health and quality of life.

^x Revised Publication Draft SADPD Evidence Base: ED 15 Aircraft Noise Policy Background Report.