

REPORT TO PLANNING COMMITTEE

CHESHIRE EAST LOCAL PLAN

Report Reference PL-26-02
Meeting Date 7th September 2026
Agenda Item 9
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1.0 BACKGROUND

In July, Cheshire East Council formally started the process of developing a new local plan.

The local plan is the principal planning document, which, along with a spatial development plan¹ and neighbourhood plan, forms the “development plan” for an area. All planning decisions must be taken in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The new NPPF contains national decision-making policies, which are a material consideration.

The new local plan will cover a period through to 2045, it will contain updated planning policies and will allocate sites for housing and employment development. It will replace the existing local plan strategy, which was adopted in 2017, and the site allocations and development policies document (2022).

Since adoption of the current local plan the government has introduced a new method for calculating local housing needs which is known as the “standard method”. This approach has increased the housing requirement in the borough to 2,530 homes per year and currently means Cheshire East does not have a five-year housing land supply. This new housing number will inform the allocation of sites for housing in the new local plan and constitutes a 41% increase on the existing local plan requirement, or 159% increase on the earlier standard method.

Following changes to the legislative framework through which local plans are prepared, the borough will be working to a strict timeframe with adoption of a new local plan scheduled for March 2029. The formal start of the process will be at the end of October, which starts a 30 month timetable.

2.0 SCOPING CONSULTATION

The first formal consultation commenced on 21st July and closed on 1st September. The Scoping Consultation sought input on “what the new local plan for Cheshire East should contain, and how future consultation and engagement should be carried out”. It presented an early opportunity to input into the development of a major policy document. Information on the consultation was emailed to all members on 23rd July inviting input.

Although it is noted that the consultation fell during the summer recess, the level of engagement/input from members was not commensurate with the importance of the local plan. Only six members responded to the initial email (of those, only two were Planning Committee members) and only five replied to the draft consultation response (of which only one was on the Planning

¹ Developed by a combined authority

Committee). Two members had requested the submission go before the committee for approval, but due to the timeframe and member availability it was not possible to schedule a quorate meeting.

The submitted response has been appended to this report for noting.

3.0 PLAN PROCESS

Cheshire East Council has published a timetable to which it is working to meet the 30-month timeframe. The government sets out detail of what is expected at each stage.

The next formal consultation will be the “Notice of Plan Content and Evidence Consultation” which is scheduled to commence by 5th July 2027 and will conclude by 16th August 2027. This consultation must include:

- draft vision and any proposed aims and objectives
- proposed spatial strategy
- a summary of the evidence the council intends to gather and details of any evidence they have already gathered

The consultation can include any other elements the council wishes to consult on which may include initial draft policies.

The “Proposed Plan Consultation” is planned to commence by 3rd May 2028 and conclude by 28th June 2028. This consultation will be on a proposed local plan, including the full site allocations. The plan would then be submitted for examination by the Planning Inspectorate on 29th September 2028.

Further detail is awaited from Cheshire East Council as to when in the process it will determine the level of development required across different settlements and undertake appraisal of submitted sites.

4.0 ENSURING ENGAGEMENT IN THE LOCAL PLAN

During the development of the previous local plan (2012-2017), Knutsford was well led by community groups established for different areas. These groups are no longer active, and it is understood that the leading personnel within these groups would like to see a new generation of community leaders come forward to represent the town. Knutsford benefitted greatly from their input in the local plan process, where the professional approach of the Knutsford community was highlighted in the examination stage by the Inspector.

In 2024, the Town Council hosted a workshop to which the community was invited to input into the then ‘initial issues’ consultation.

The council’s submission to the scoping consultation has called on Cheshire East Council to undertake more engagement as part of the process than indicated in the consultation. The Town Council should consider how it wishes to work to ensure that the community is aware and inputting into the local plan.

4.1 LOCAL PLAN WORKING GROUP

It is suggested that the committee gives consideration to establishing a Knutsford Local Plan Working Group.

The objective of the working group would be to develop community leadership in the local plan process and maximise focus given to issues arising from the local plan.

The working group would report to the Planning Committee and comprise a (to be determined) number of members and residents. The council would invite residents to apply to join the working group. The remit of the working group would be to:

- promote awareness of the local plan
- promote engagement in the process
- develop proposals for consultation responses for Planning Committee approval

The aim would be to engage a pool of residents to work with members to ensure Knutsford has a strong voice in the local plan process and develop well informed responses to the consultations.

4.2 LOCAL ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMME

In the absence of the borough council not taking up this council's suggestion of local engagement events, the town council should consider hosting information and engagement events/activity. The objective would be to develop community awareness of the local plan, promote better understanding of the local plan process and gather community input to inform consultation responses. This would be led by the working group.

5.0 DECISIONS REQUIRED

The committee should:

- a) committee should note the council's submission to the Cheshire East Local Plan Scoping Consultation
- b) note the timetable for developing a new Local Plan
- c) consider how to lead Knutsford's input into the new Local Plan