

Knutsford Town Council

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SUBMISSION TO THE CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL NEW LOCAL PLAN SCOPING CONSULTATION AUGUST 2026

Knutsford Town Council welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the development of a new Local Plan for Cheshire East. The submission below addresses the key inputs the Town Council wishes to raise, and which are of particular relevance to Knutsford.

The format of this document follows the numbered paragraphs of the consultation where possible and reference to the relevant paragraphs is included. For the avoidance of doubt, reference to a particular paragraph does not limit the input to that paragraph where it is relevant to wider/other sections.

Period, Vision and Objectives

Paras 5.1-5.4

Knutsford Town Council supports the proposed plan period of 2029-2045 as a sensible duration for the plan

The Local Plan should expressly refer to and emphasise the importance of community led plans for towns and villages. The delivery of the local plan in Knutsford should support the aims of the Knutsford Neighbourhood Plan, Knutsford Town Council Strategic Plan and other planned or emerging strategies being prepared by the Town Council (such as the Knutsford Town Centre Masterplan, Knutsford Green Spaces Strategy and Knutsford Active Travel Infrastructure Plan).

The objectives of the new local plan should be to meet the mandated housing and employment development requirements, whilst ensuring:

- a) The necessary infrastructure to support growth in towns and villages is provided as early in the development cycle as possible
- b) Development takes place in the most environmentally friendly way possible delivering sustainable buildings and spaces which are designed to minimise carbon emissions and manage surface water
- c) Biodiversity and ecology are enhanced, with important habitats preserved and habitats enhanced or created through development
- d) The rural character of the borough is preserved, with access to the open countryside retained and enhanced
- e) The borough's town centres thrive as places to do business and support the everyday needs of residents
- f) Communities have access to the facilities, services and spaces they need to thrive, with development supporting the sustainability of and providing investment into existing facilities, and providing new facilities which are vested in community ownership

Identifying and Assessing Sites

Paras 5.8-5.14

The methodology for assessing sites should be shared with Town and Parish Councils in advance of being finalised. It should specifically include provision for involving Town and Parish Councils in the assessment of sites to enabling a meaningful contribution to the determination of the future growth of their areas.

As part of the site selection methodology, due regard should be given to ensuring development is appropriately distributed across the borough. This should consider existing and future infrastructure requirements (e.g. access to schools, medical services, traffic, sport and leisure facilities etc) and must consider how any deficit in infrastructure will be addressed in tandem with development coming forward.

The current local plan allocated two sites which were subsequently shown to be of significant wildlife value (LPS38 and LPS13). In Knutsford (LPS38) this has resulted in consent for development on a site of high habitat distinctiveness and in Macclesfield (LPS13) this resulted in the withdrawal of proposals (though only because the site was part owned by CEC) resulting in reduced housing delivery. As part of the evidence and site selection process, Cheshire Wildlife Trust should be commissioned to assess the biodiversity/ecological value of land to ensure that environmentally sensitive sites are not allocated for development.

Green Belt and Strategic Green Gap

Paras 5.15-5.19

In reviewing the Green Belt, particular attention should be given to three key Green Belt policy objectives:

- a) Preventing urban sprawl – the local plan should minimise the potential subsumption of northern towns/villages into the Manchester conurbation
- b) Prevent the merging of towns and villages – this is particularly relevant for Knutsford where the policy should ensure there remains a strong green belt boundary between Knutsford and Mobberley. It is also relevant for Nantwich and Crewe where the ‘green gap’ should be upgraded to green belt.
- c) Preserving historic towns – the Green Belt in the borough should preserve the setting of its key historic towns, such as Knutsford.

Where it is not appropriate to secure this by amendments to or preservation of the Green Belt, strong Strategic Green Gap policies should aim to achieve the aim of ensuring neighbouring communities do not merge.

Settlement Hierarchy, Spatial Distribution and Development in Settlements

Paras 5.20-5.28 and 5.47-5.49

The current local plan prioritised housing allocations around the Principal Towns and Key Service Centres, with limited development at the Local Service Centres and other settlements. Knutsford Town Council supports the local plan setting out a settlement hierarchy, which continues to be a sensible approach to strategic planning.

This approach should allow for the allocation of a significant portion of the borough housing requirement to be distributed to the local service centres and other settlements. In particular it should

look to allocate smaller sites within villages which have the basic amenities to support additional housing (e.g. a local shop, proximity to a primary school etc). This approach would simultaneously:

- a) reduce the development pressure on the borough's smaller towns
- b) promote the development of smaller sites
- c) provide sustainable growth for more rural settlements (supporting local amenities)
- d) provide investment in more rural settlements through planning obligations and CIL funding
- e) provide opportunity for new facilities in rural settlements to be delivered through planning obligations (e.g. creating new public open space, provision of allotments etc)

In the settlement hierarchy, the currently named "infill villages" should simply be named "villages".

Affordable Housing

Paras 5.33-5.35

As part of developing the new local plan, each locality should have an up-to-date housing needs assessment to understand demand for affordable housing.

The 30% affordable requirement should be upheld as a minimum with a greater proportion delivered where possible; where necessary, this could be further enhanced by use of commuted sums held by the council to fund additional affordable units on development sites.

Housing affordability continues to be a significant issue in Knutsford, where house prices are significantly higher than many other areas. The result of this is policies where pricing of affordable housing at a percentage of market value does not deliver truly affordable units. An illustration of this is that the market value of a 2-bed home on the Tabley Park development in Knutsford is approximately £475,000, a 30% discount to £332,500 would still make this unaffordable for many first time buyers. The local plan should therefore consider requiring greater discounts off the market price in areas such as Knutsford, where the market price is significantly higher than average, to ensure that these homes are genuinely affordable.

The local plan should address the conflict between ensuring high-quality homes and the impact this has on affordability.

The local plan should specifically support Cheshire East Council delivering its own socially rented affordable housing schemes on surplus land it holds.

Housing Mix and Housing for Older People

Paras 5.36-5.41

As stated above, a housing needs assessment for each major settlement should be undertaken to identify the types of housing which are needed in that community. Policy should then require developments to deliver a housing mix in accordance with the assessment, either a proportionate mix or delivering development that meets the greatest needs.

The housing needs assessment should include the needs of older persons accommodation to identify what is needed in each locality (e.g. supported living, bungalows, alms houses, care homes etc). This should be locality specific and more specific than the council's 2019 Residential Mix Study. When allocating any strategic development sites, the council should consider the need to require sites to deliver institutional living and, for all sites, policy should require the delivery of a suitable proportion

of homes designed for older people.

The provision of bungalows in development has been extremely lacking. This is an important housing type which enables older residents to move into accommodation that enables independent living. A specific policy should require the delivery of bungalows and their long-term retention (i.e. preventing conversion into dormer bungalows or adding storeys).

The majority of privately developed retirement living (e.g. McCarthy Stone) are out of the price range for many retirees. Affordable single living properties should form part of the housing mix. For large sites, policy should require developers to work with local alms house providers (or local councils to establish such a provider where none exists) to create a section of alms houses within developments, this could constitute a portion of the affordable housing requirement for that development. The Marjorie Hurst Trust (which operates such housing in Knutsford) cites demand for further units.

The local plan should explore the allocation of sites for retirement villages which comprise regular but small homes for independent living, supported living, residential care homes and dementia care all on the same site. This should be led by the housing needs assessment.

Additionally, Knutsford Town Council considers the local plan should ensure the provision of housing designed for young people – for example simple, lower cost apartments.

Employment and Economy

Paras 5.65-5.69

It is recognised that since the current Local Plan Strategy there have been significant changes in employment demand, predominantly brought about by flexible working which has arisen post-pandemic. However, it is important that the plan continues to safeguard sites for employment uses and as such the principle of policy EG3 of the CELPS should be retained.

Since the 2017 Local Plan there has been a significant increase in homeworking, particularly within large employers, leading to reduced demand for large office accommodation. An assessment should be undertaken of current vacant/unoccupied employment accommodation to inform whether any further types of employment development are necessary.

Consent for new employment development on virgin sites should not be given where demand could be met from existing sites. Policy should promote the reuse or redevelopment of employment sites where they are no longer in demand.

Town Centres

Paras 5.70-5.75

There is a general view that Knutsford has an abundance of some town centre uses (e.g. hairdressers) and a dearth of others (e.g. affordable clothing). Whilst it is recognised that this is largely outside the scope of a local plan, any measures which support balancing retail provision would be supported.

Knutsford Town Council is developing a *Town Centre Masterplan* (as guided by the Knutsford Neighbourhood Plan) which will seek to identify solutions to a range of issues within Knutsford's town centre, such as parking provision, pedestrian accessibility and public realm. Policy should expressly support the implementation of such plans and secure developer contributions to its implementation.

Transport and Infrastructure

Paras 5.91-5.95 and 5.112

All major development should be required to fund active travel improvements which connect the development site with areas to which journeys would be made (e.g. schools, town centres, transport hubs) to promote active travel. Town and Parish Councils should develop active travel infrastructure plans to direct where this investment is needed, beyond the strategic investments in towns identified in the LCWIPs.

Policy should require all developments to incorporate measures which promote active travel within and beyond the sites, for example cycle/pedestrian linkages (shortcuts) within the development and connecting to existing streets/paths, provision of infrastructure to promote active travel (e.g. cycle shelters/parking on green spaces) and cycling/footpaths within the sites. Where relevant, this should be expressly referred to in the site allocation. This will be best informed by Town and Parish Councils.

Nationally, there have been a number of tragic accidents involving fires from exploding batteries. Policy should secure that new housing includes a safe place for the charging of electric scooters and e-bikes to prevent them from being charged in areas which could present a safety hazard in the event of a fire.

A policy should continue to support the reopening of the Middlewich Branch Line and a new railway station in Middlewich. This could deliver a wide strategic upgrade to the railway in Mid Cheshire and will be key to increasing capacity on lines such as the Mid Cheshire Line.

Whilst it is recognised that it is outside the control of the local authority and there are no current plans for this, policy should support development which enable the enhancement or expansion of public transport networks to ensure there is no impediment to, for example, expansion of the Greater Manchester tram network.

Policy should require all major housing developments to be designed to incorporate bus routes, whether or not there is currently a service which would visit. For example, there should be space for bus stops/laybys and the ability for buses to travel within a development.

Where possible, new development should contribute to the expansion or introduction of bus routes to serve the development connect it with key employment, shopping, leisure and education sites.

Parking Standards

The requirement to provide three parking spaces per dwelling for 4/5+ bedroom homes should apply within Key Service Centres as it does in the remainder of the borough. This is a particular issue where extensions/rebuilds increase the size of homes without providing an increase in on-site parking, leading to on-street parking which clutters streets and leads to pavement parking.

Parking size standards should be updated to reflect the larger size of modern cars and ensure sufficient space is provided for the size of cars which are now commonly owned.

Current parking standards do not require cycle parking provision for C3 uses other than for flats/apartments. There should be a requirement for cycle parking provision for C3 Dwelling Houses and HMOs.

The local plan should support the increased provision of parking in towns where there is an identified

parking shortfall or where it would contribute to the sustainability of a town centre. This should support the development of multi-storey or subterranean car parks where they are designed to be in keeping with the surrounding area.

Natural Environment

Paras 5.96-5.103

The local plan should have a suite of policies which ensure any development strongly contributes to the natural environment. This should include policies which:

- ensure planting schemes are predominantly native species and suitable for the area
- require native, non-invasive hedges as plot separation rather than fences (and require their retention)
- result in the delivery of on-site biodiversity enhancements e.g. through the creation of wildflower meadows, wetland areas and woodlands etc.
- require significant numbers of trees and hedgerows to be planted across developments
- require development to contribute to an enhancement of wildlife corridors to and from the site with landscaping plans which incorporate internal wildlife corridors throughout the site.
- require nature to be designed into buildings by providing nesting space and shelter for birds, bats and bees and provide 'hedgehog highways' and similar measures
- promote larger domestic gardens. The emerging practice is for significantly smaller gardens which places great pressure on their usage and will lead to reduced biodiversity i.e. arising from resistance to planting trees which shade small gardens etc.
- require development sites to have a greater amount of open space across the site

Climate Change Adaptation

Paras 5.114-5.117

The new local plan should ensure that new development is designed to adapt to a changing environment, and to mitigate the impact of development on the climate. Policy should ensure that all new houses and employment development is designed to minimise emissions and resource usage, for example by requiring all homes to have solar panels, requiring large developments to incorporate ground source heat pumps or district energy networks and including grey water recycling systems.

Measures to promote reuse of construction materials should be strongly supported, particularly where this can lead to more unique design in construction.

New development should be planned in accordance with passive solar design principles to minimise energy demand and policy should require every house to be fitted with one or more water butts to collect rainwater and reduce freshwater usage. This will also support the ability of SUDs to cope with excessive rainfall. Hardstanding on new development should be limited and permeable surfaces should be required to prevent excessive water runoff.

All development should prioritise measures to promote active travel and public transport; this should include ensuring bicycle parking facilities are planned within developments and active travel routes to/through sites are created/enhanced.

Consideration should be given to the safeguarding of sites for wind/solar farms where this does not conflict with the needs to allocate housing development and protect agricultural land.

Recreation and Community Facilities

Paras 5.118-5.124

Development presents an opportunity for the establishment of new community assets and public open space.

There should be a cascade approach to vesting the ownership of new public open space in the appropriate body, with community assets vested in the ownership of management companies as a matter of last resort. Sites should firstly be offered to the borough council, then to the relevant parish or town council and lastly vested in a management company. This should enable, for example, a community to take ownership of a new park to ensure that as a public asset it is funded by all users and not just the residents of a new development site.

As part of the evidence base, there should be an assessment of required community facilities / required investment in community facilities. Development should be required to address these needs through planning obligations or by the provision of new facilities (e.g. community meeting spaces, scout halls etc).

All development should create leisure walking/cycling routes within sites and connecting to existing footpaths.

Heritage

Paras 5.125-5.130

To support the development of the Knutsford Neighbourhood Plan, Knutsford Town Council prepared the *Knutsford Character Assessment (2018)*. It provides a detailed analysis of the character of the Town, defining the distinctive character of thirteen areas by recording their landmarks, topography, landscape, layout, streetscape, architectural style, materials, views/vistas, origins and land use over time. An understanding of the key features of these character areas encourages development which enhances the area and Knutsford's historic legacy sense of place. The new local plan should promote the preparation of Character Area Assessments for implementation across the area which should be delivered through neighbourhood planning.

Policy should require that applications within conservation area are accompanied by a clear statement setting out how it supports/enhances/addresses issues within the conservation area appraisal and management plan. The policy should aim to strengthen the status of the appraisal documents and management plans to secure enhancement of the conservation areas.

Town and Parish Councils should be invited to submit proposals for "exceptional townscapes". The effective protection of such townscapes should be included in local plan policy as assessment of how a development impacts on townscapes is important, just as development impacts on the landscape are informed by the 2018 Cheshire East Landscape Character Assessment.

Design

Paras 5.131-5.138

There is no uniform design/vernacular for the entirety of the borough and every settlement has its own unique sense of place. It is therefore imperative that design is looked at on a settlement-by-settlement basis.

The Knutsford Design Guide was developed as part of the Knutsford Neighbourhood Plan. This should be the Design Code for Knutsford. Should it require amendment to comply with National Model Design

Code guidance, the Town Council would undertake a review and update to create a compliant document.

Where practicable, design codes should be locally led, the borough council should either work directly (or through a commissioned third party) with localities to develop design codes or set out that Neighbourhood Plans should develop design codes as part of the plan.

Engagement Strategy

The development of a new local plan will have a major impact on communities for generations. It is a complex and multifaceted project within a government-mandated scheme where the council has discretion in some areas and not in others. The plan making system is not well understood by the general public which is part of what leads to frustration and a lack of faith in local government. The council has an opportunity to address this through its engagement strategy.

This process will be controversial, with residents having a range of views on each topic the plan will address. It should be an aim of the engagement strategy not just to have “engaged” residents on the plan, but to have educated and informed residents on the process and planning. Engagement should be designed to leave residents feeling meaningfully engaged, having had opportunity to question, challenge and understand.

To maximise engagement, the council should:

- Ensure that all documents and consultations are available in all libraries – it is not sufficient, proportionate, nor defensible to only provide these in Macclesfield and Crewe when the borough council has a base in each town.
- Deliver a local plan roadshow in each town. This should involve local members and the local town council to help coordinate and promote the activity. It should present an opportunity for the borough council to explain the process and current stage and facilitate meaningful discussion. This would be particularly pertinent for the site selection process, where time can be taken to discuss sites properly with residents rather than relying on a one-sided engagement method such as the current consultation. Whilst this will require additional time/resource, it presents an opportunity to better engage residents and develop public understanding of the process and the limitations within which the borough council must operate.
- Work closely with Town and Parish Councils, holding specific in person and virtual briefings to ensure local councillors are well informed and can help lead planning engagement in their areas. This should include ensuring that queries from Town and Parish councils concerning the local plan are responded to quickly. Town and Parish councils should be closely involved with the site selection process to provide their local intelligence and shape their communities. Again, this presents an opportunity to develop local planning knowledge for the long-term benefit of communities.
- The borough council should develop a number of videos to support the process, which could simply be in the form of a recorded slideshow with audio. This would provide residents with a resource to learn more about the process in an engaging medium, can enable the council to convey that there are humans behind the plan development, and it offers an opportunity to explain aspects of the plan making process in more detail.

The proposal to hold citizen assemblies is commendable. However, they are extremely small and will not be representative. The council should consider larger assemblies.

It was regrettable that this consultation was undertaken during the school holiday period and with little advance notification. This has led to criticism. The council should endeavour to ensure that it undertakes consultations with greater notice (which it should be able to do through setting out a clear programme) and wherever possible avoid consultation periods during the school and Christmas holidays.