

CHESHIRE EAST LOCAL PLAN DRAFT DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Purpose of the Report

To highlight the publication of the Cheshire East Council Local Plan: Development Strategy and Policy Principles consultations and to agree formal representations to be made on behalf of the Borough Council.

Recommendations

- (a) That the Committee note the document and its contents.**
- (b) That the Committee endorse the content of this report and that it forms the basis of the Borough Council's formal response to the consultation within the required timescale.**

Reasons

The Cheshire East Council Local Plan is a Development Plan Document that will form part of the Local Development Framework for Cheshire East. It will have implications for the future nature and scale of development in Cheshire East. This consultation paper presents an opportunity for the Borough Council to ensure that its views are taken into account in the process of developing the Strategy by Cheshire East Council. It is considered beneficial to submit a formal representation, as it could potentially undermine the delivery of the Joint Core Spatial Strategy if the Council does not raise any issues it considers will have an unacceptable impact on that Strategy.

1. Background

- 1.1 Cheshire East Council has produced a Development Strategy and an Emerging Policy Principles document as part of the next stage of the Cheshire East Local Plan. The Borough Council, as a neighbouring authority, has been consulted on these documents. Comments need to be received by 26 February 2013. The next step will involve consultation on the submission draft Core Strategy of the Local Plan in late spring/early summer 2013. The independent examination of the final Plan (conducted in public by a Government-appointed inspector) is anticipated later in 2014.
- 1.2 The Development Strategy sets out the Council's essential thinking about the future shape and growth of Cheshire East. It is an employment led development strategy aimed at stimulating economic growth and enhancing Cheshire East's position as the economic powerhouse of the North West. The Strategy makes provision for a significant amount of new housing to help ensure the jobs led growth is delivered. Nevertheless, the Strategy is one of medium growth to create prosperous and sustainable communities – with the provision of new employment areas and transport infrastructure being fundamental to its whole approach.
- 1.3 The proposals for creating jobs and providing new homes are very much in line with the objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 1.4 Different parts of Cheshire East have different relationships with different authorities. For example the north of the area is effectively part of the Manchester conurbation with strong links in both the residential and commercial markets. The south of the administrative area does however have very strong links to North Staffordshire and it is the proposed development in and around Crewe, Congleton and Alsager and Junction 16 of the M6 motorway which will be the focus of this report and the proposed consultation response.
- 1.5 The full Local Plan can be accessed via from the following web address www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/planning/cheshireeastds
- 1.6 Maps showing the location of the key strategic sites in the South East Growth Corridor be available in the Members room and on display at the Planning Committee meeting.

2. **Previous Consultation Response**

2.1 Newcastle Borough Council submitted a joint representation with Stoke-on-Trent City Council at a previous consultation stage of the Plan, in February 2012.

2.2 The issues raised can be summarised as follows:

- Proposed employment and mixed-use sites could be developed for business parks/large scale offices which would be highly detrimental to the Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent Core Spatial Strategy approach as set out in policy SP2 – Spatial Principles of Economic Development; this policy seeks to focus office development within Newcastle-under-Lyme Town Centre and Stoke-on-Trent City Centre.
- Employment sites to exclude large-scale B1a office development, unless it could not be accommodated elsewhere.
- High levels of out-of-centre office development could undermine the objectives of the adopted Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent Core Strategy. It is therefore considered that it would be appropriate for this type of development to be directed towards the town centres in line with national policy.
- In respect of Cheshire East's emerging housing proposals insufficient consideration is given to the impact to the on-going regeneration of the North Staffordshire conurbation and how major greenfield residential development could seriously impact regeneration.
- Insufficient consideration is given to the linkages between South Cheshire and North Staffordshire.

3. **Duty to Co-operate**

3.1 Under the Localism Act Cheshire East Council is under a Duty to Co-operate. This provision was intended to ensure that after the revocation of Regional Spatial Strategies there remained a means by which effective cross border working and cooperation could be secured.

3.2 In addition the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that Local Planning Authorities should work collaboratively with other bodies to ensure that strategic priorities across local boundaries are properly coordinated and are clearly reflected in individual Local Plans.

3.3 The NPPF also states that Local Planning Authorities should take account of different geographic areas, including travel-to-work areas. They are expected to demonstrate evidence of having effectively cooperated to plan for issues with cross-boundary impacts when their Local Plans are submitted for examination.

3.4 Your officers have engaged in two meetings with Cheshire East Council, involving Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council and Staffordshire County Council. At these meetings your officers have consistently expressed concern regarding the scale of growth to the south of Crewe. Questions have also been asked about the potential implications for local infrastructure, particularly schools in the Kidsgrove area should schools to the south of Crewe not be able to accommodate the proposed levels of growth.

3.5 However, whilst acknowledging that Staffordshire and Cheshire East are relatively close geographically, Cheshire East Council regard the two areas as culturally and regionally distinct and see the south of Cheshire as being very much part of the North West with connections much further afield than Staffordshire. They consider that the proposals in the Development Strategy 'should be viewed as complementary and not contradictory to the needs of Staffordshire.'

4. **Key Issues**

4.1 **Overall Growth**

The proposal is to pursue a medium growth strategy to accommodate an increase in the number of households by 24% from 154,000 to 191,000 by 2030. This will involve a gradual increase in housing provision from its current RSS annual total of 1,150 dwellings, through to an average provision of 1,500 homes per annum after 2020. This equates to an average of 1,350 homes per annum between

2010 and 2030 i.e. a total of 27,000 dwellings. It will also involve the delivery of 300 hectares of business and general industrial land over the same period with the aim of creating 20,000 jobs.

- 4.2 Of this growth the vast majority is targeted at Crewe and Macclesfield, the two largest towns, with the remainder around the key services centres including Congleton and Alsager. It is the scale of growth associated with Crewe which will have a direct impact on the Borough and City of Stoke-on-Trent and raises the most important issues.

4.3 Proposed Growth Distribution

Development that is seen as necessary to support the regeneration of Crewe involves the development of 6 - 7000 homes in and around this 'Principal Town,' plus at least 100 ha employment land to support its regeneration. Table 1 below identifies the sites which are likely to have the greatest impact on the Borough.

- 4.4 **In addition** major growth including the creation of two new settlements is planned to lie in an area named as the 'South East Crewe Growth Corridor,' in very close proximity to the boundary with Newcastle, see Table 1. This involves the development of at least a further 2,000 homes and a further 54 hectares of new employment land. Cheshire East favour the creation of these new settlements rather than increasing the amount of development on the periphery of existing constrained settlements. Both settlements are greenfield Village A – Crewe Hall is in an area currently defined as the Green Gap in the Crewe and Nantwich Local Plan and the Village B at Barthomley is in the North Staffordshire and South Cheshire Green Belt.

- 4.5 The two new settlements have been identified as preferred options primarily because their development will provide funding for the upgrading of the A500 between Crewe and Junction 16 of the M6. This is justified on the basis that it will work to both facilitate employment growth along this part of the A500 corridor and improve linkages between Crewe (which is seen as a national hub) and the M6 as well as Stoke-on-Trent/Newcastle. Significantly also, the land surrounding the road is also owned by the Duchy of Lancaster and as such can not be acquired by compulsion, only by agreement.

- 4.6 It is also claimed that the new settlements will ensure that the potential benefits of the proposed HS2 northern route can be optimised, although this is dependent upon the final decision in relation to HS2 and its connection with Crewe. However a case could be made that the sites to the north and west of Crewe (which are not in the Green Belt or Green Gap) offer a more sustainable location for housing development and they would pose less risk to the North Staffordshire Regeneration.

- 4.7 Congleton and Alsager are identified as 'Key Service Centres' and development is proposed which is linked to their distinctive needs and characteristics. The level and location of development in these areas does not appear to raise any significant issues for the Borough.

4.8 Green Belt

Development along the A500 corridor as part of the new settlement at Barthomley will require a review of this part of the North Staffordshire and South Cheshire Green Belt, although at this stage is not possible to define the extent of the Green Belt that is likely to be affected. The Green Belt boundary was originally drawn to prevent the coalescence of settlements in Cheshire and North Staffordshire. Cheshire East do not consider that an adjustment of the Green Belt in this locality would impinge on the wider integrity of the North Staffordshire and South Cheshire Green Belt and believe the case for securing vital transport infrastructure improvements means that there is a case for exceptionally considering development in specific circumstances along the A500 corridor.

- 4.9 Your officers consider that it is too early to judge whether the wider integrity of the North Staffordshire and South Cheshire Green Belt is not undermined because the extent of the incursion is not defined, but there is a case that given the scale and concentration of development that appears to be being proposed within the Green Belt, its strategic role as a feature separating Crewe from urban areas of North Staffordshire is being eroded.

4.10 Employment

Significant new employment areas are proposed to underpin the strategy – in Crewe at Basford West and at Basford East (with the aim of creating 6,000 jobs); and three employment areas, near to Junction 16 of the M6 motorway; Radway Green near Alsager, see Table 1. The plan to create new employment sites at and close to Junction 16 is likely to directly compete with employment sites in the Borough and City of Stoke-on-Trent. The Basford East site makes provision for a large amount of office development (up to 80%) and as such is contrary to both national policy' and the objectives of the Council's adopted Joint Core Spatial Strategy.'

Table 1 Development Summary

Area South of Crewe		
Strategic Site	Proposed Development	Site Location
Basford East	1,000 new homes, supporting retail, education, community and sport and leisure facilities including a Hotel. 45 hectares of new employment land, with a mix of B1(70-80%) and B2 (20-30%) but no B8 aimed at creating 4,000 jobs.	Basford East
Basford West	300 new homes supporting community and sport and leisure facilities including a Hotel. 35 hectares of employment land with a mix of B2 and B8 units delivering 2000 jobs.	Basford West
The Triangle	300 new homes, supporting community facilities.	Between the villages of Shavington and Wybunbury
East Shavington	300 new homes, supporting community facilities.	Eastern edge of Shavington Village
South East Growth Corridor		
Site	Proposed Development	Site Location
Village A	1,000 new homes, supporting retail, education, community and sport and leisure facilities. Development is expected to help fund dualling the A500 and improvements to Junction 16.	Crewe Hall
Village B	1,000 new homes, supporting retail, education, community and sport and leisure facilities. Development is expected to help fund dualling the A500 and improvements to Junction 16.	Barthomley
Phase 1	4 hectares of employment land linked to improvements at Junction 16 M6.	Junction 16 – M6
Phase 2	Phased delivery of 25 hectares of employment land.	Radway Green
Phase 3	Phased delivery of 25 hectares of employment land.	Junction 16 – M6

5. **Conclusion**

- 5.1 The scale of growth proposed in the plan is considered to be acceptable and in line with the proposed evidence base and the NPPF. It is the view of officers however that development in the locations proposed at Basford East and in the 'South East Growth Corridor' would undermine the strategic objectives of the adopted Core Spatial Strategy and that this would serve to damage to the regeneration of both the Borough and City of Stoke-on-Trent.
- 5.2 Furthermore, it is considered that a case can be made that the growth proposed can be better managed by developing alternative sites to the north and south west of Crewe. In your officers' opinion these sites would be inherently more sustainable than those listed in Table 1. Their location to the west and north of Crewe would also link them more strongly to Crewe and Cheshire East than to North Staffordshire. There are also sites listed within the consultation document as alternatives to the new settlements at Village A and Village B. Again development in these areas would better support the growth of Cheshire East and would not undermine the regeneration of North Staffordshire.
- 5.3 Your officers consider that it is necessary to continue to express concern that the Draft Strategy does not give any consideration to the fact that the scale of development in the South East Growth Corridor has the most potential to impact on the regeneration of both the Borough and City of Stoke-on-Trent. This is in spite of the fact that both the Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West and for the West Midlands acknowledge the need for neighbouring areas to practice some form of constraint in terms of development on the borders of North Staffordshire. In your officers' opinion the Local Plan should make it clear how consideration has been given to the economic impact on the North Staffordshire conurbation, and the Borough's 'Travel to Work Area,' and if necessary propose policies to help mitigate any identified impact.
- 5.4 Overall it is the view of officers that insufficient consideration is given to the linkages between South Cheshire and North Staffordshire and that the priority has been to devise a strategy which strives not to undermine strategic objectives within Greater Manchester and unfortunately fails to strike a suitable balance with regard to the impact on North Staffordshire.

6. **Next Steps**

- 6.1 The current consultation ends on 26 February 2013, it is proposed that a joint response will be prepared with the City of Stoke-on-Trent if members at both authorities come to a similar view. The response will be based on the points raised in this report and on any other points members feel are relevant.
- 6.2 Under the Duty to Co-operate your officers will endeavour to engage constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis with representatives from Cheshire East. To assist with future working arrangements Cheshire East has proposed establishing a number of officer led themed working groups to investigate in more detail the impact on; employment; housing and transport/infrastructure and how this can be addressed as part of the plan preparation process.
- 6.3 It is expected that given the nature of the plans Cheshire East will ultimately wish to have discussions at officer, Chief Executive and senior member level in order to fully comply with the Duty to Co-operate.
- 6.4 Cheshire East acknowledge that, if ultimately agreement cannot be reached on a policy outcome following a joint working process, then this will need to be resolved through the examination process based on evidence. At the very least Cheshire East must specify the implications of their Strategy on North Staffordshire in order to be found sound.

7. **Background Papers**

Joint letter to Cheshire East Council 27/02/12 re: Cheshire East Consultation Town Strategies Consultation
Cheshire East Local Plan – Draft Development
Strategy & Policy Principles
Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent Core Spatial Strategy

