



A Response to the Issues and Options (Regulation 18) stage of the CW&C Local Plan review 2025

September 2025

Introduction

Our thanks to Rob Charnley, Head of Planning and Placemaking at Cheshire West and Chester Council for meeting with us (the members of the Strategic Development and New Works committees of CCT) to brief us on the current position and direction of the Authority's Local Plan Review.

We understand that the urgency of progressing with the Local Plan Review is because the Government has recently re-introduced mandatory housing targets on local authorities, and that CW&C is required to demonstrate it can provide for 29,000 new dwellings between 2025 and 2030. This represents a significant increase on the current plan provision.

Summary

The Council suggests that it is considering three different approaches on how to achieve its mandated housing targets for the County. The first of these, Option A, would proscribe any new development in the half of the County that is classed as greenbelt except in exceptional circumstances. **For a variety of reasons, we feel that Option A is not an appropriate strategy to adopt.**

We would support following a hybrid approach of options B and C. In other words, a strategy that continues with the emphasis of the current local plan but with special attention being paid to concentration of new housing provision in sustainable locations close to existing transport hubs.

Chester?

Following on from the strategic view, we have taken it that the Council might expect to hear from Chester Civic Trust specifically whether any further **volume housing on the periphery of the City** would be harmful to its historic character. Our answer (but subject to important caveats) is that a well-sited and well-constituted neighbourhood (or neighbourhoods) can contribute positively to the function of the City and **need not in essence be harmful to, or dilute, its historic character**. We believe that the scale of suburban expansion of the city in the 20th and 21st Centuries has already removed sensitivity to further expansion. That is not to criticize the character of urban villages like Hoole and Handbridge Chester, but the city cannot be described as a ‘small, cosy, market town’ that could be harmed by large suburban expansion.

The city has a significant, distinctive and well-protected historic core. We believe that what really matters for any new volume development on the periphery of the city is that it should aim to be a truly healthy and sustainable neighbourhood that embodies the best contemporary interpretation of local and regional materials and not rely, for instance, on superficial street-naming associations with heritage to camouflage purely generic solutions.

Some challenges and opportunities around strategic options in detail

As with any organisation like CCT there is a wide variety of environmental skills and depth of experience amongst its focus groups. Inevitably there will be some differences of emphasis on such a complex matter as to where and how development can best be achieved in the County. So, the following is just a sample of concerns covering Place, People and Movement, that have majored in discussion and that influence our joint view of where and how development happens.

Green Belt

Nationally and regionally the Green Belt policy, originally coined in the 1950s and as currently described in the NPPF (23) has been broadly successful in its primary aims of limiting urban sprawl and preventing adjoining towns and cities from merging. But the areas are delineated in hard lines on the map of the UK and the five tenets increasingly need to be interpreted and applied intelligently and flexibly according to specific geographic and evolving demographic conditions.

The North Cheshire Green Belt as currently defined covers over 40% of the county. If the policy was to be followed to the letter and all the mandated development was confined to the south of the county this would result in a quite non-sensical intrusion into the rural area and country towns. This might maintain ‘openness’ to the north but would arguably seriously deplete the ‘countryside quality’ to the south. The character of the corridor along the M56 to the north of

the county may be largely ‘open’ but its character is dominated by highly visible energy infrastructure and markers of its industrial activity.

There is an argument that says that rather than tilt at windmills by trying to get the boundary of the greenbelt (any green belt) changed, perhaps accept the virtues of the policy as a whole but expand, case by case, documented examples of logical exceptions within respective boundaries.

Movement

There is a strong belief in some quarters that Option C should have priority over where major developments are located. National strategy would see sustainable development along public transport corridors. It makes sense to place housing and employment sites where the links are very easy and convenient and can make various modes of public transport a seriously attractive alternative to the car.

In this connection we feel that the obligation to collaborate with neighbouring authorities is absolutely vital and we note the forthcoming plan for devolution, and trust that possibilities such as a southwest cheshire transport/employment/housing hub that could be based on villages to either side of the border with Cheshire East on the main London-Crewe-Holyhead line. This might be an example of where the proposed sub-regional design unit could take the lead.

People and Process

Those looking at new development from the perspective of planning process feel that in addition to monitoring and forecasting demographic trends as they may transpire nationally and regionally, there should be **urban capacity** studies undertaken (if not already in hand) that aim to assess current and possible future brownfield capacity of Chester and other urban areas in the County.

It is suggested from the planning perspective that any changes or insertions into the Green Belt at the time of adoption of the plan should be designated as ‘white land’. Development should only be permitted in such areas when ongoing urban capacity assessments show that such ‘white land within the Green Belt’ should be released in order to maintain a five-year supply of housing to meet current targets. This should only occur following a statutory review of the plan so that updated housing needs can be incorporated into plan policy.

With regard to house type, there was universal acknowledgement in discussion that the housing market has become seriously distorted in recent years with rising prices and so access to **affordable housing**, both first time ownership or rental properties for young people/families should be prioritised and perhaps release of green belt land might be conditioned to accommodate this. In addition, we would expect the Council to do its best to encourage/demand that all new housing meets the latest ‘Homes for All’ aspirations.

Urban Design

Ideally the authority should prepare masterplans for any urban extensions, and these should be adopted as supplementary planning guidance. If resourcing is not possible for such detail, then at least there should be a design brief prepared for each site and a requirement that developers observe the essential tenets of the brief and how any scheme lives up to the **Design Code** that the authority is currently producing. That said we hope that the design code majors on ways of creating **distinctive and legible neighbourhoods** rather than on too much prescription of 'architectural' detail

Any master plan should be based on the principles of sustainable development to minimise the need for car journeys and include an easily accessible and identifiable local centre connected by public transport, pedestrian and cycle links which contains all the necessary amenities and services to sustain the local community as it develops. It should also promote a mix of dwelling types and tenures to ensure it meets the broad housing needs of the community, especially for genuinely affordable housing.

John Tweed

On behalf of the Strategic Development and New Works committees of Chester Civic Trust.
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