

## **Cheshire East Council (CEC) Local Plan Consultation**

### **Response**

#### **Introduction**

This is the consultation response of Councillors Brian Bagnall, John McGahan and Mike Hurleston (Bramhall South and Woodford, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council). This consultation response raises concerns as to whether a number of issues have been satisfactorily addressed or resolved by the current draft Plan.

- Transport
- Green Belt and Site Selection
- Other services and infrastructure

In addition to this, as Councillors in a ward which will be directly affected by the outcome of these proposals we would wish to raise further concern about the consultation process itself.

#### **Transport**

We note that there is a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between SMBC and CEC, signed on 26<sup>th</sup> February 2016. This establishes a duty to co-operate and locates where further work is needed along with a work programme. The MoU seeks co-operation on “all cross boundary planning and transports with a view to achieving the proper planning of the wider area”. Importantly, the MoU is clear that no agreement has currently been reached with regard to the cross-boundary transport implications of the strategy and that there is a difference of opinion on the impact of the proposals. We consider that the impact of the strategy to be severe. As local Councillors, we believe that the disagreement on the cross-boundary transport impacts of the strategy needs to be resolved before the strategy can progress so that any necessary mitigation measures and appropriate mechanisms for their implementation can be planned strategically at an early stage. There are a number of agreed work streams between CEC and SMBC and with partners such as TfGM (Transport for Greater Manchester) which have material relevance to the Local Plan Strategy which have not yet been completed.

Without adequate forward planning, the potential congestion resulting from the draft Plan will impact on the efficacy and sustainability of the road-transport network and on the wellbeing and health of Stockport residents. The A555 Relief Road (part of the SEMMMs strategy) is currently under construction and due to open in 2017. The key focus of the SEMMMs strategy and this relief road is the removal of existing traffic and congestion from local communities. The project (costing in excess of £230m) is designed to provide much needed relief to local roads and residents for a period of up to 10 years. However, if the Cheshire East Plan in its current format is implemented it will use up and exceed the current

projected capacity of SEMMMS freed up for local communities, taking the road transport network back to and beyond the already unacceptable levels of congestion in the area.

The SEMMMS A6-MARRR is designed to provide relief to local communities and remove existing traffic. It is not designed to provide a “development window” to allow Cheshire East to refill the vacated roads, taking congestion back up to or beyond current levels. We consider that the delivery of a refreshed strategy is therefore necessary and essential prior to any further progression of the CEC PLS. We have not seen any response or comments from Highways for England.

We would argue that it is likely there will be a need for a significant investment at a strategic level over and above that contained within the SEMMMS project and to an extent greater than acknowledged by the Draft Local Plan.

We agree with SMBCs position that the impact of the proposed Local Plan Strategy is of such significance as to warrant within CECs plan the explicit undertaking of improvements or the integration of appropriate mechanisms to deal with the cross-boundary and SMBC transportation impacts prior to adoption. Put simply, Councillors believe the impacts to Stockport of Cheshire East’s Plan are so severe that they must be addressed within the Plan now. Not doing this will risk a CEC strategy that is unsustainable and unrealistic if it results in a gridlocked and strangulated transportation road network across a significant area of two Boroughs and through one of the main access routes to the wider Greater Manchester economic area.

### **Other services and infrastructure**

With specific reference to the North Cheshire Growth Village, currently there is no detail within the strategy regarding provision for education, health and wellbeing and services required by a large new housing settlement. As local Councillors, we believe that the Plan has not adequately considered the impact on services in Stockport (such as education and health and wellbeing) of establishing a sizeable new community immediately on the boundary. Additionally, we do not consider that strategic proposals for a North Cheshire Growth Village can be considered sustainable and viable in the longer term without serious strategic consideration of the need for services (education, health etc.) supporting communities and how these can be provided at an early stage. We note that these services are provided in alternative locations within the Cheshire East boundary and consider that scaling these up would be preferable to starting from scratch.

### **Green Belt and site selection**

As Councillors we agree the methodology of first considering brownfield sites, then non-Green Belt sites and lastly, Green Belt sites is the correct way forward. However, we consider the inclusion of the North Cheshire Growth Village which encroaches the Green Belt to a considerable level to be out of line with this approach and against the NPPF

paragraph 79-81 and that exceptional circumstances have not been sufficiently demonstrated for such a large scale removal when a considerable number of brownfield sites have not been utilised and until these have been allocated and exhausted we consider the development into the green belt to be inappropriate. We don't believe the case for the siting of the Village has been proven or justified in the Strategy. We cannot understand why aligning any development alongside existing towns and villages within Cheshire East has not been considered first. This would provide greater use of brownfield sites and make use of existing services and their ability to upscale.

The proposals for the North Cheshire Growth Village will have a detrimental impact on the historic village of Woodford and its residents. The strategy does not appear to take into account the wider area and the other large scale housing developments in the immediate vicinity which are either underway (Woodford Garden Village, 950 houses) or actively within the planning process (E.g. Seashell Trust proposed development, initially 325 houses). The cumulative effect of multiple development sites at the Cheshire East Stockport border risks creating a cross-border area of high level or density development which significantly erodes the Green Belt and the character of the area.

There are numerous wider strategic implications to introducing a sizeable new population at the North Cheshire Growth Village Site along with the other developments underway. The Greater Manchester Strategy (cited in the Draft Plan) states that Manchester has the fastest growing population in the UK which creates a massive challenge. Creating a sizeable new settlement at this site on the edges of Greater Manchester could result in the effect of a non-delineated expansion of the Greater Manchester conurbation where the community has a higher level of identification with GM region authorities, particularly neighbouring Stockport, rather than with Cheshire East therefore placing more pressure on Stockport's infrastructure and services. Many, if not most, residents at this location are likely to travel daily to the North into the conurbation to access the major employment sites in the GM region thereby making more call on the transport infrastructure and services of neighbouring Stockport.

We note the draft plan includes provision for a Green Gap policy so Crewe and Nantwich do not coalesce (their combined populations would result in an overall population of around 100,000). In contrast, the proposals and strategy for the North Cheshire Growth Village result in the introduction of a new population which could merge with existing settlements in Stockport creating urban sprawl in existing Green Belt of potentially larger size and number than that in Crewe and Nantwich and for which the protection of a Green Gap is not being provided within the Plan. This seems illogical.

### **Consultation Issues**

As local Councillors representing residents who will be affected by the draft Plan and specifically by the proposals for the North Cheshire Growth Village, we have concerns

regarding the consultation on the draft Local Plan. While the consultation has been publicised on the Cheshire East Council website and within Cheshire, there has been an unsatisfactory level of engagement with residents in the immediate vicinity on the Stockport boundary side. We would have expected more engagement with residents directly affected by the Plan and the North Cheshire Growth Village proposals given the commitment to achieving the proper planning of the wider area.

We are not aware of engagement with the stakeholder communities and residents of Woodford and Heald Green. Cheshire East Authority seemed unaware of the existence of the Woodford Community Council – an important stakeholder body in the area which provides a voice for residents and has extensive links and reach into the local community. Cheshire East Council does not appear to have made an attempt to engage with local Councillors, the MP or Woodford Community Council and we believe this is a significant oversight in the consultation.

Just one consultation event took place for those residents directly affected by the North Cheshire Growth Village proposals and Local Plan Strategy. This gave the appearance of having been hastily arranged, publicised on a Friday with the event taking place on the Tuesday. On attending the event, it appeared that there was no record taken of the numbers attending, officials were unable to answer questions and referred to the consultation period as being open with no close date. As far as we were able to ascertain those running the consultation did not record the views, opinions or feedback of attendees. This resulted in a lost opportunity which gave the impression of a tick box exercise and information distribution rather than genuine engagement and view finding of local residents.

The extent of the consultation was extremely limited with just one event taking place on a weekday. Clearly, this limited access made it very difficult for working local residents to attend. Repeat events running later into the evening or at a weekend would have offered more access at more suitable times for local residents.

We also believe that residents without internet access have been left at a severe disadvantage.

### **Conclusion**

We welcome the opportunity to engage with the development of the CEC Local Plan Strategy and while acknowledging there have been some changes and a welcome agreement to work with SMBC, as local Councillors we still have concerns with a number of elements of the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy and believe further work is required in order to achieve proper planning of the wider area.

Specifically, our concerns mostly relate to the cross-boundary transport implications of the plan and the siting of the north Cheshire Growth Village. As stated in the above, we do not

yet believe agreement has been reached between the authority areas on the level of impact on the transport infrastructure. Significant work streams to resolve this and establish the level of impact and the necessary level of mitigations potentially required within the Strategy remain outstanding. In order to provide a sustainable plan these work streams and their resultant conclusions should be completed and included in the Local Plan Strategy prior to adoption.

As local Councillors whose residents are directly affected by the siting of the North Cheshire Growth Village proposal, we do not believe the case has been adequately made for the siting of this proposal and the surrender of much valued local Green Belt land. We raise concerns about the impact on services, transport infrastructure, the character of the area, the detriment to local residents' health and wellbeing. We also believe that when viewed alongside the proper planning of the wider area and adjacent development already planned and/ or underway this creates an unacceptable coalescence of population and loss of green land. We have concerns about the quality and extent of consultation with residents directly affected by the proposal to site the Village at its currently proposed location and therefore on behalf of residents wish to see the relocation of the Cheshire Growth Village to a more suitable and sustainable location outside of Green Belt land alongside further consultation with practical and deliverable solutions prior to the CEC Local Plan Strategy being adopted.

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