

Mary Robinson MP response to the Cheshire East Local Plan

The Cheshire East Local Plan has been a contentious issue in my constituency. My constituents and I have fundamental concerns to aspects of this plan and I would ask that you consider this letter as my consultation response.

I understand that local groups such as Woodford Community Forum and Councillors from Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) have submitted their own detailed responses on individual sites. Rather than duplicate their comments, I will instead seek to address broader concerns regarding the plan:

- Transport
- Site selection
- Infrastructure and other services

Transport

The A34 serves both the local traffic movements and commuting needs of my constituents in Cheadle as well as the wider area, and the A34/A560 junction is one of the five busiest in Greater Manchester with an annual average weekly traffic flow of 74,500 vehicle movements. As a result it is often highly congested and I have been advised by SMBC that the A34/A560 Gatley Junction is “substandard” and operating “considerably beyond design capacity”.

Whilst I note that the A34/Coppice junction will be improved as part of The Plan to support the North Cheshire Growth Village in Handforth East, I believe there is no provision to mitigate the effect on the A34 Gatley Junction and, therefore, further loss of performance and deterioration seems inevitable.

Additionally, much of the development outlined in the plan in the areas around Handforth, Poynton and Wilmslow appear to be reliant upon increased capacity created by the construction of the SEMMMS Road which is expected to be opened in 2017. The key objective of the SEMMMS/A6 to Manchester Airport relief road is to remove existing traffic from local communities, and there is real concern that the Cheshire East Plan would severely impact the road’s future capacity.

Therefore, it is clear to me that more investment is needed in transport planning at a strategic level, and consideration must also be given to Stockport’s own growth needs.

Site Selection and the Green Belt

In their response, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council agree with the methodology employed by Cheshire East Council to select their sites for the plan. SMBC also appear to agree that exceptional circumstances exist for the release of green belt land due to a lack of affordable housing and suitable sites.

Whilst I appreciate that Cheshire East Council feel that the extent of the current green belt has impacted on its ability to grow economically, I disagree that this constitutes enough of an exceptional circumstance to override the protections afforded to green belt Land by paragraphs 79 and 80 of the NPPF.

Where there are still brownfield sites which have not been utilised or exhausted, consideration should be given to developing these rather than reclassifying such a large section of the green belt.

The impact of the North Cheshire Growth Village in Handforth East and other proposed sites would lead to the large scale erosion of green belt land on the outskirts of Cheadle Hulme, Woodford, and

Heald Green. This increases the likelihood that our towns and villages will merge together and leave urban sprawl unrestricted. Ultimately, this could lead to around 4000 houses being built on green belt land in close proximity to my constituency. This is particularly concerning as green belt land within Stockport, including in my constituency of Cheadle, is under pressure as a result of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority's (GMCA) Spatial Framework proposals.

Furthermore, I note that in the Crewe and Nantwich area it is proposed that a 'Green Gap policy' be introduced to prevent the two conurbations from coalescing – the same consideration should equally apply in the North of Cheshire East.

Other Services and infrastructure

Adequate provision for education, health and wellbeing, and other services is required when planning for a large conurbation of housing. There is lack of a detailed strategy for this with regards to the North Cheshire Growth Village, instead there seems to be a reliance upon this service provision in alternative locations. Given the proximity of the Growth Village to Cheadle Hulme, Woodford and Heald Green it is not unreasonable to anticipate that this provision may be sought in these areas putting pressure on existing local services.

Conclusion

For the reasons outlined above, I would recommend that further efforts are made to consider the impact of increased traffic and congestion, mitigation of urban sprawl and loss of the valuable green belt on the borders of Cheadle constituency.

I would urge reconsideration of this the size and scale of North Cheshire Growth Village and that consideration be given to creating a 'green gap' in the north of the Cheshire East area as well as in the south.