Cheshire East Local Plan Scoping Consultation: A Submission from Peckforton Parish

A One-Page Overview of Key Issues Followed by Five Pages of Specific Comments

1. Our submission concentrates solely on one aspect of the proposed "new local plan", namely "the amount and locations of new housing and employment development".

2. The government's new method of calculating local housing need has seen the requirement jump from 977 new homes to be built per year, to 2,530, i.e. 37,950 dwellings over the 15 years of the next local plan, 2030-2045. We fully recognise the considerable pressures such a dramatic increase imposes on Cheshire East, its planners and the local community. That also argues for strategic prioritisation and focus of resources on to the sites capable of making the most immediate, straightforward and least contentious contribution to the new housing requirement.

3. A number of methodologies are currently under development, including those for determining site allocation, land availability assessment, spatial distribution, settlement hierarchy review and sustainability appraisal. A timeline for their completion should be produced. Furthermore, Cheshire East has confirmed that all sites submitted will be subject to detailed assessment using chosen criteria before any decisions are made. Individual communities should be invited to comment on these criteria. They need to be properly defined before assessment begins.

4. Thorough consideration needs to be given to the adequacy of local infrastructure. Many areas of the borough, and particularly across the countryside, are incapable of sustaining new development.

5. A 4-tier settlement hierarchy is already in place and although not a national policy requirement, it seems a most sensible approach, capable of making a strong contribution to prioritisation, location of sites for development, densification and infilling. Within each tier there is a case for further stratification so, for example, in the fourth tier, "Other settlements and rural areas", varying degrees of weighting should be given to site development reflecting unique character and distinctiveness of different types of countryside. Should an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (National Landscape) be designated or an area be considered for it during the development of the local plan, this should automatically be granted the highest level of protection, and so should conservation areas and sites of special scientific interest.

6. It is encouraging that Cheshire East's scoping consultation emphasises the importance of protecting the natural environment, heritage assets and biodiversity. This should be meaningfully incorporated within the proposed forward vision for 2030-45, be a formal strategic priority and become one of the ten defined outcomes for tracking and ongoing measurement.

7. While Cheshire East is clearly under considerable pressure to build a substantial number of houses, that should not mean that previous legislation, planning policies, guiding principles and established precedents going back decades are ignored. Spatial strategy examinations and site assessments from previous submissions are readily available and provide a valuable reference point on sites deemed unsuitable for development. Equally, detailed and objective appraisals completed in the past have similarly examined and defined the unique character and local distinctiveness guiding site allocations. The Peckforton Plan 2007 is an excellent example.

8. Active community participation and ready access of local knowledge will clearly play an important role in informing future stages of the local plan. We recommend that stronger engagement principles, together with a detailed timetable of key deadlines, are systematised and published.

This submission was made by letter to Cheshire East Council (Strategic Planning Team), Delamere House, Delamere Street, Crewe, CW1 2LL on 24th August and also online through 23 comment boxes on 25th August 2026.

Cheshire East Local Plan Scoping Consultation

Submission of Specific Comments from Peckforton Parish, 24th August 2026

The Chair of Peckforton Parish Meeting, Neil Dyer, circulated details and a link to Cheshire East's scoping and consultation for the new local plan to all residents during August 2026. Jon Hughes, of Quarry Bank, Peckforton, drew together initial submissions for the scope, particularly concentrating on ensuring that it respects and protects Open Countryside, the character and heritage of Peckforton, Green Belt, Conservation Areas and the Natural Environment.

Three source documents were specifically referred to for our submission: Cheshire East Local plan scoping consultation online site (with consultation running from 21st July to 1st September 2026), the agenda from the Cheshire East Town and Parish Council Network meeting 11th August 2026 and the circulated Minutes.

In addition, past planning policies, guiding principles and established precedents have been drawn on, with particular reference to Peckforton Plan 2007, Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Strategy.

With the short notice for consultation, it was not possible to discuss the full content of the submission with residents, but that is scheduled for the next parish meeting on 1st September 2026.

1. Scoping consultation introduction

1.1 "Peckforton residents recognise that the scoping consultation is only the first formal stage of engagement. Unfortunately the timescale was inadequate, and its schedule during school summer holidays meant that it was difficult to obtain the views of residents on critically important vision and strategic priorities for Cheshire East. Could there please be clearer timescales and lengthier time allocated for consultation and input throughout the full process from 2026-2029."

2. New local plan

2.1 "The increase in housing requirement to 2,530 houses to be built per year is startling. How will appropriate balance be secured between top-down national planning frameworks / pressures to build versus proper protection and improvement of heritage assets, conservation areas, open countryside and the historic environment?"

2.6 **Developing the new local plan**. "The next consultation is scheduled for Summer 2027, including details of the proposed spatial strategy of where development will happen, which is likely to be contentious. This consultation needs to be over a considerably longer time period than that of the scoping consultation exercise, with more precision on key dates and timelines. Indeed, at the moment it is generally unclear precisely when Gateway Reviews will take place, as well as associated consultation and local engagement at each stage.

3. Context for the new local plan

3.3 **Increase in housing requirements**. "Peckforton residents are very concerned that National Planning Policy placing significant weight on the need to boost housing supply, allied with the challenge of locating deliverable housing sites across Cheshire East, will lead to inappropriate approvals for building in locations that would not normally have been allowed in the past, such as the countryside and Green Belt. Similarly, that planning applications may be approved, even if not in line with local wishes. Much greater transparency and specificity are required as to the criteria that might be applied in guiding such decisions. When will that be available, and in what detail?"

3.11 **Changes to Green Belt policy**. "Location and assessment of the new category of grey belt land may well provide a significant number of sites for development. How will grey belt be defined and by when will that process have been achieved?"

3.15 **Brown field development**. "This has to be a key focus. What percentage of the 2,530 houses per year is expected to be built on such sites? There is clearly a hierarchy of targeted development, with brown field and grey belt sites sitting at the top. Will they receive priority?"

3.17 **Spatial development strategy**. "This section confirms that Cheshire East is now part of the Cheshire & Warrington Combined Local Authority. At the moment there is no Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (National Landscape) status in Cheshire (although one is currently under active consideration for the Sandstone Ridge and area surrounding it). That is a glaring omission bearing in mind the highly distinctive natural landscape of the Cheshire Sandstone Ridge, incorporating the Peckforton Hills. Will securing AONB status become a strategic priority in view of its tourism, wellbeing and amenity value?"

4. Baseline information and spatial portrait

4.1 "Cheshire East is a large borough, home to 421,300 residents, with a diverse range of settlements and distinctive landscapes. Parts are deeply rural, with dispersed development, and should be kept that way. These provide a most important contrast to more developed and urbanised environments. What strategic framework will be adopted throughout local plan development to differentiate properly and reflect local priorities and requirements?"

4.11 **Heritage, culture and natural environment**. "It is a very important strategic priority to protect and sustain this environment, not least because Cheshire East is fortunate that one sixth of the population live in rural areas, 40,140 hectares of land are designated as Green Belt, farmed land is 70.3% of the borough's land, there are 78 conservation areas, nearly 3,000 listed buildings and numerous areas designated for their landscape and wildlife value. Peckforton residents, in line with other rural parishes, wish there to be an explicit assurance that this priority will be fully respected. It is a counterbalance to urban development and densification elsewhere.

"How will the preservation and expansion of leisure and tourism for borough residents and visitors be incorporated within the local plan? As an illustration, Peckforton contains a Grade 1 Listed Castle and an English Heritage-listed Elephant & Castle statue, is an access point for the Sandstone Trail, home of the Wesley and Ancient Oak Trees and has many beautiful footpaths cutting across the parish, over the Peckforton Hills, around meres and protected wetlands. Numerous activities take place throughout the village and its neighbouring countryside: trail running, orienteering, cycling, car rallies, riding, footpath walking and simply savouring the heritage of the landscape. Inappropriate development will erode these leisure assets."

4.17 **Settlements and rural-urban composition**. "The borough consists of several towns of varying sizes, along with an extensive rural area covering many villages and smaller settlements. There needs to be a strategic emphasis within the new local plan that maintains the importance of that balance."

5. Scope of the new local plan

5.2 **Creating a vision and objectives**. "A determination to frame a short vision statement for Cheshire East, accompanied by up to ten measurable outcomes, is welcomed. There needs to be proactive consultation on this to ensure that the rural perspective and maintenance of heritage assets is properly incorporated. As an example, securing inclusion of an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (National Landscape) as a strategic asset for the whole county should be included."

5.5 **Planning for growth**. "Economic growth for Cheshire East is vital but it must be sustainable while properly protecting and enhancing the natural, built and historic environment. How will that balance be secured within the local plan?"

5.8 **Identifying and assessing sites**. "There have been two recent calls, in 2024 and 2026, for housing sites. On neither occasion were Peckforton parish officials or residents informed. Precisely how will sites be identified and assessed from now onwards, how will timely consultation be achieved and when will the land availability assessment methodology (under preparation) be available for scrutiny? What input will be sought on its refinement and application?"

5.15 **Green Belt**. "While the 400 sq. kms. of Green Belt need to be appropriately protected, we welcome the Borough-wide Green Belt assessment exercise being undertaken to identify Grey Belt land. When will that be completed? We endorse the approach whereby sites outside the Green Belt are considered first for development, with maximization of brown field, Grey Belt and under-used land wherever possible."

5.20 **Settlement hierarchy**. "While there is no requirement in national planning policy to set a hierarchy of settlements, it is a very sensible approach that Cheshire East has adopted to set a 4-tier settlement hierarchy with a strategy for development at each tier: principal towns, key service centres, local service centres, other settlements and rural areas. We would emphasise that within the lowest tier there are numerous differences and accordingly recommend further classifications to reflect the significant difference between, say, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (National Landscape), rural conservation areas, open countryside, farm land and potential targets for infill villages, appropriate limited infilling within a defined village boundary and edge-of-settlement growth."

5.24 **Spatial distribution**. "The spatial strategy approach appears sound, but how will appropriate weightings for a wide range of factors be established? Will they be published and open for consultation and feedback? In Peckforton, we have a particular interest in the factors to do with 'landscape character, nature and ecology issues, heritage matters, agricultural land quality, open spaces and other green infrastructure, Green Belt and strategic green gap designations', as well as management of conservation areas."

5.27 **Development in settlements**. "How and by when will local policies be developed to pinpoint where 'the benefits of development are substantially outweighed by any adverse factors'. More specifically, what are these adverse factors?"

5.29 **Development in the countryside**. "What is the status of previous local policies such as the Peckforton Plan 2007, Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Strategy? We strongly advocate their development, updating and application in building site selection."

5.96 **Natural environment**. "We strongly endorse the statements that: 'The natural environment is a highly valued asset in Cheshire East and the new Local Plan will play an important role in protecting and enhancing it for current and future generations'. Furthermore, consultation on the Local Plan Issues Paper 2024 highlighted strong public interest in protecting and enhancing biodiversity and valued landscapes. How will that be further defined and mapped across the borough and precisely how will it inform site selection decision-making processes and criteria?"

5.125 **Heritage**. "Cheshire East is fortunate to be a rich and diverse historic environment with a plethora of heritage and non-designated assets now identified through the council's Local List and the recently adopted Heritage and Local List SPD. We fully endorse the statement that: 'The new Local Plan will need to balance the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment with the delivery of housing, employment and infrastructure.' What processes and methodologies will be deployed to best achieve that balance?"

5.128 **Conservation areas**. "While initially encouraged by the scoping document assertion that 'conservation areas are recognised as important elements of local identity and character' and that 'national policy continues to give strong protection to conservation areas and requires their significance to be considered in decision-making', residents of Peckforton, as one of the 78 designated areas, have three major concerns:

i) **The need for holistic assessment**: Cheshire East has indicated that the adequacy of existing conservation appraisals and management plans ***may*** be reviewed. We argue that they should be reviewed and not discounted when assessing site applications within a conservation area, its surrounding open countryside, any Sites of Special Scientific Interest and both designated and non-designated Heritage assets. Such a holistic assessment is integral to full and proper understanding of the character and integrity of the conservation area and whether any development should be approved. That can only be done on a case-by-case basis.

ii) **Fully respecting previous policies, principles, plans and precedents**: Peckforton was designated a Conservation Area in September 1973. Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 required that special attention had to be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of such a conservation area. The guidance contained in paragraph 4-14 of Planning Policy Guidance Note 15: Planning and the Historic Environment 1994 reasserted this as a material consideration to be taken into account in handling development proposals outside a conservation area but which could negatively affect its setting or views into or outside of the area. Furthermore, the Peckforton Plan 2007, Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Study, produced an extensive, detailed, factual and objective appraisal of Peckforton and how its special architectural, historic character and appearance is preserved and enhanced.

While Cheshire East may be under considerable pressure to build houses, it should not mean that previous legislation, policy, planning principles and precedents developed over decades should be ignored. Peckforton residents feel particularly strongly that the well-defined and distinctive characteristics that make their village a conservation area, together with the Peckforton Hills (currently under strong consideration to be part of an AONB / Natural Landscape) and surrounding open countryside must be properly protected and not traded off for property development. Also, areas of tree cover and ancient oaks were protected by Area of Special County Value for Landscape status.

iii) **Mitigating inflexible, arbitrary and highly contentious policy**: in response to a question raised by the Peckforton Parish Chair at the network meeting on 11th August about strategic prioritisation and resource allocation, we were most disappointed *inter alia* to receive the response that 'under government requirements the local plan must identify at least 10% of the overall housing needs on small sites (less than 1 ha) and a further 10% on medium sites (between 1 ha and 2.5 ha). As a result, despite the considerable pressure on planning department resources, the council must continue to consider both small and large sites through both the planning application and local plan processes. Assessment of suitability of sites will include looking at Conservation Areas, Green Belt locations, other heritage assets and AONBs (if any exist!).' We argue that this policy, and specifically the nationally imposed 10% targets, should be flexibly interpreted and fully take into account the holistic features that make each conservation area distinctive.

As indicated above, we are aware that under the new local plan submissions may be allowed for sites in conservation areas and that Cheshire East will assess sites in line with government guidance. We wish to request further details of this and sight of such guidance.

Finally, we welcome Cheshire East's encouragement for us to contribute local knowledge and evidence capable of playing an important role in informing future stages of the plan and we wish to confirm our readiness to do so. This is particularly important in assessing site submissions within

conservation and surrounding areas. To do this we must be fully informed of critical timelines and have dates for consultation clearly diarised.

5.145 **New evidence**: "A body of further evidence and methodologies is under development, for example determining site allocation, heritage assessment, land availability assessment, settlement hierarchy review, spatial distribution of development report and sustainability appraisal. When will the timeline for their completion and application be available? Will they be available to access through the new planning portal?"

6. Proposed local plan engagement strategy

6.60 **Stakeholders**. "While we welcome the proposals throughout section 6, such as 'clear engagement principles', active 'community involvement' and clear 'governance of the process', we have felt inadequately informed and engaged. Peckforton parish, with its residents and community as a prime stakeholder, has been disappointed by the initial consultation process on the Local Plan. The parish did not receive full information even though it was available, nor were we included in or informed of the 2024 and 2026 calls for site submissions. Therefore we welcome a Local Plan Engagement Strategy containing real clarity on who will be engaged, when that engagement will occur throughout the plan-making process and precisely how consultation and participation activities will be delivered, together with the macro timeline covering the full process from 2026 to 2029."