

Cheshire East Local Plan Scoping Consultation

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

Conservation Areas

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.