

Trafford Conservative Group Response

Cheshire East Local Plan Scoping Consultation

Development around Ashley, Rostherne and Mobberley - Cross-Boundary Impact on South Trafford

Submitted by Trafford Conservative Group | 31 August 2026

The Trafford Conservative Group welcomes the opportunity to respond to Cheshire East Council's Local Plan scoping consultation.

We recognise the need to provide new homes and to plan positively for future growth. However, new housing cannot be considered in isolation from the infrastructure required to support the people who will live in it.

Our principal concern is the potential cumulative impact of substantial development around Ashley, Rostherne and Mobberley on neighbouring communities in South Trafford, particularly Hale, Hale Barns, Bowdon, Altrincham and Timperley.

This is an early-stage Local Plan process. Cheshire East has made clear that Call for Sites submissions are not planning applications or agreed allocations and that many submitted sites may never be taken forward. Nevertheless, sites submitted through the 2024 and 2026 exercises are to be assessed for suitability, availability and deliverability, and this is therefore precisely the stage at which major infrastructure and cross-boundary issues should be identified.

Administrative boundaries do not determine where residents go to school, visit a doctor or dentist, travel to work, catch a train or use emergency services. Decisions taken by Cheshire East immediately alongside Trafford could therefore have very significant consequences for Trafford residents.

Infrastructure must be provided in advance of, or in step with, development - not promised after the homes have been occupied.

1. Clarity over the scale and status of the Ashley proposals

There has been considerable public uncertainty about the scale of development associated with Ashley.

Figures appearing during this debate have ranged from an initial phase of approximately 250 homes, through approximately 1,000 to 1,100 homes, to a much larger 11,000-home longer-term scenario.

Tatton Estate initially publicly described its thinking as approximately 1,000 homes over the longer term, beginning with an initial phase of around 250 homes. It subsequently stated that its current proposal is for up to 1,070 homes on eight parcels south of the M56.

There is, however, a further source of understandable public concern. A 31 March 2026 letter from consultants acting for Tatton Estate reportedly stated that land submitted in 2024 remained available and referred to longer-term potential for approximately 11,000 homes and 490,000 square metres of commercial floorspace. Tatton Estate has subsequently said that it is not promoting an 11,000-home development and that the relevant larger sites, including land north of the M56, have now been withdrawn.

Cheshire East's own consultation portal also contains representations referring to the approximately 291-hectare, 12-site Ashley submission and representations based upon an 11,000-home scenario.

We do not seek to attribute to Tatton Estate a proposal which it now says it is not promoting. However, the changing public position inevitably creates uncertainty for residents, neighbouring authorities and others seeking to make an informed response.

A consultation can command full public confidence only when people can clearly understand what land remains under consideration, what has been withdrawn, the indicative scale of development being contemplated and the status of earlier submissions.

We therefore ask Cheshire East Council to publish an unambiguous statement confirming:

- which Ashley sites remain live for assessment;
- which sites have formally been withdrawn and when;
- whether withdrawn sites will have any continuing role in the Local Plan evidence base;
- the indicative housing capacity currently being considered for the remaining land;
- whether any larger or longer-term development scenarios remain capable of being considered during preparation of the Local Plan.

This is particularly important when the land being discussed, and the development capacity associated with it, has changed materially during the consultation period.

Nevertheless, our infrastructure concerns do not depend upon the 11,000-home figure.

Whether the eventual figure is 250, approximately 1,100, 5,000 or 11,000 homes, the fundamental question remains: where is the infrastructure plan to support them?

Even approximately 1,100 additional homes would constitute a significant development immediately alongside South Trafford and would require a rigorous cross-boundary assessment.

2. Cumulative impact - Ashley cannot be considered alone

Our concerns are not limited to Ashley.

Potential additions and development pressures around Rostherne and Mobberley must be considered alongside Ashley, rather than each location being assessed as though development elsewhere did not exist.

An individual development may appear manageable when considered in isolation. The position can be very different when a number of developments using the same schools, roads, railway infrastructure, healthcare services and emergency services are considered together.

The Local Plan evidence base must therefore examine the cumulative development picture across Ashley, Rostherne and Mobberley.

Particular consideration should be given to the combined demand placed upon:

- primary and secondary education;
- SEND provision;
- GPs and NHS dentistry;
- police and fire and rescue services;
- ambulance and emergency response;
- roads and strategic junctions;
- rail capacity and the Hale level crossing;
- buses and wider public transport;
- drainage and sewage;
- utilities;
- flood risk;
- the Green Belt and physical separation of communities.

The correct test is not simply: 'Can this individual site be accommodated?' It must also be: 'What happens when this site is added to all the other development being considered across the wider area?'

That cumulative assessment must extend across the local authority boundary into Trafford.

3. Secondary school places - our principal concern

Our greatest concern is education, and particularly secondary-school capacity.

South Trafford already experiences significant demand for secondary-school places. It would therefore be wholly unacceptable for substantial additional housing in Cheshire East immediately alongside Trafford to proceed on an assumption that existing Trafford schools can absorb the children generated by that development.

We strongly support the principle that Cheshire East must plan, secure and fund the secondary-school capacity required by development within Cheshire East.

Cheshire East development must not be predicated upon spare places being available in Trafford.

Before substantial housing is allocated around Ashley, Rostherne or Mobberley, Cheshire East should work formally with Trafford Council and education providers to establish:

- how many primary and secondary-age children the cumulative development would generate;
- current and projected school capacity on both sides of the boundary;
- realistic pupil travel patterns;
- the potential effect upon Trafford admissions and catchment areas;
- additional SEND provision required;
- whether new primary schools are required;
- whether a new secondary school within Cheshire East is required;
- the land required for that provision;
- how it would be funded;
- the point in the development programme at which it must open.

The required secondary-school infrastructure must be operational in advance of, or in step with, occupation.

It cannot be acceptable to build and occupy large numbers of houses and only then discover that there are insufficient school places.

Where a new secondary school is required to make development sustainable, enforceable phasing should prevent development proceeding beyond an agreed number of occupied homes until that school is available.

Schools must come before the pressure, not after it.

4. GPs, NHS dentists and healthcare

The same principle applies to healthcare.

Substantial additional housing means a substantial additional population requiring access to GPs, NHS dentists, pharmacies, community health services, hospitals and other NHS provision.

It cannot simply be assumed that existing practices in Cheshire East or neighbouring Trafford will absorb the additional demand.

Before sites are allocated, Cheshire East should work with the relevant NHS bodies and Trafford Council to assess:

- existing GP capacity;
- projected additional patient numbers;
- NHS dental capacity;
- community healthcare requirements;
- additional pharmacy provision;
- pressure upon hospitals and urgent-care services;
- the land and funding required for any new healthcare facilities.

Additional provision must be secured and delivered in advance of, or in step with, occupation.

Healthcare infrastructure cannot be left as a future aspiration after population growth has already occurred.

5. Police, Fire & Rescue and emergency services

We believe the potential impact on Police and Fire & Rescue Services deserves specific consideration, rather than being treated as a minor item within a general infrastructure list.

A substantial new population inevitably creates additional calls upon policing, fire and rescue, ambulance services and wider emergency response.

These services operate with finite resources. Development affecting several communities simultaneously can require additional officers, appliances, response capacity and supporting infrastructure.

A cumulative emergency-services assessment should therefore be undertaken in consultation with Cheshire Constabulary, Greater Manchester Police, Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service, Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service, North West Ambulance Service and other relevant agencies.

Particular attention should be paid to cross-boundary incidents and response times.

Additional population and increased road congestion can have a double effect: increasing demand upon emergency services while simultaneously making it more difficult for those services to travel quickly through the area.

Cheshire East should demonstrate:

- projected additional demand;
- whether existing police and fire resources can accommodate that demand;
- whether additional stations, facilities, vehicles or personnel are required;
- how additional capacity would be funded;
- whether emergency response times could be affected by additional congestion.

Emergency services should not simply be expected to spread existing resources more thinly to accommodate development.

6. Roads and traffic - the boundary does not stop the cars

The highway implications of this development cannot be considered solely within Cheshire East.

Residents of Ashley, Rostherne and Mobberley are likely to make significant numbers of journeys towards Hale, Hale Barns, Bowdon, Altrincham, Manchester Airport, the M56 and Greater Manchester.

The existing rural road network contains narrow routes, constrained junctions, bridges and pinch points.

A comprehensive transport model should therefore examine:

- vehicle movements generated by the cumulative development;
- the destinations of those journeys;
- traffic entering Trafford;
- junction capacity within South Trafford;
- Hale and Altrincham town-centre congestion;
- school-run traffic;
- bus journey times;
- Manchester Airport-related traffic;
- M56 access;
- the effect of congestion upon emergency-service response.

It would be inadequate to demonstrate that junctions immediately adjacent to a development can function while ignoring congestion several miles away created by those same journeys.

7. Rail capacity and the Hale level crossing

Rail is an especially important cross-boundary issue.

Proximity to Ashley railway station may be relied upon as evidence supporting sustainable development. But the existence of a station does not by itself establish that major development can be accommodated.

Any assessment should examine existing service frequency, capacity, destinations and the realistic travel patterns of future residents.

More importantly, if substantial housing development creates a case for additional trains or increased service frequency on the line through Ashley and Hale, the consequences for the Hale level crossing must be assessed.

When the barriers at Hale are lowered, traffic using this important route through the village stops altogether.

Additional train movements could therefore result in more frequent barrier closures and potentially:

- longer queues through Hale;
- congestion spreading onto surrounding roads;
- delays to buses;
- delays to parents travelling to schools;
- disruption to local businesses;
- delays to emergency-service vehicles.

There is therefore a clear potential contradiction which requires examination.

If increased rail use is relied upon to justify substantial development at Ashley, but accommodating that demand requires more frequent train movements, what is the resulting impact upon the Hale level crossing and the South Trafford highway network?

Rail improvements should not be considered separately from their consequences for the road network.

The combined impact of additional homes, additional cars, additional rail passengers and potentially more frequent barrier closures must be modelled together.

8. Public transport generally

A railway station alone does not make a location sustainable.

The evidence base should consider:

- frequency and capacity of rail services;
- destinations served;
- station access;
- walking and cycling connections;
- bus provision;
- connections with Altrincham Interchange;
- access to employment centres;
- dependence upon private cars.

Cheshire East must demonstrate that the proposed scale of development is supported by a realistic and funded public-transport strategy rather than an assumption that residents will change their travel behaviour after the homes have been built.

9. Drainage, sewage, utilities and flooding

Major development would also create substantial additional demands upon sewage, surface-water drainage, electricity, water and telecommunications infrastructure.

This must be considered cumulatively.

The question cannot simply be whether an individual development can devise a drainage solution within its own boundary.

Cheshire East should demonstrate:

- available foul-sewer capacity;
- required network upgrades;
- surface-water management;
- effects upon the River Bollin catchment;
- flood risk downstream;
- electricity-grid capacity;
- potable-water capacity;
- the programme and funding for necessary upgrades.

Infrastructure should be operational in advance of, or in step with, occupation.

10. Green Belt and the separation of communities

The countryside around Ashley performs an important strategic function.

It helps maintain the physical separation between communities in Greater Manchester - including Hale, Hale Barns and Altrincham - and communities in Cheshire such as Ashley, Mobberley and Knutsford.

Large-scale development risks progressively eroding that separation.

This is another reason why individual sites cannot be looked at in isolation.

One development may leave an apparent gap. A second may leave another. But cumulatively, development around Ashley, Rostherne and Mobberley could fundamentally alter the character and separation of these settlements.

Once open countryside has been urbanised, that separation cannot realistically be recreated.

The Local Plan must therefore consider the cumulative effect upon Green Belt purposes, landscape character and settlement coalescence, rather than simply the effect of individual red-line site boundaries.

11. Cross-boundary working with Trafford Council

These issues demonstrate why development in this part of Cheshire East cannot be regarded solely as a Cheshire East matter.

The effects will cross administrative boundaries.

Before substantial allocations around Ashley, Rostherne or Mobberley are progressed, Cheshire East Council should undertake formal and transparent work with Trafford Council.

Trafford residents in potentially affected communities should also be given a meaningful opportunity to participate at subsequent stages.

The cross-boundary evidence should establish, at a minimum:

1. The cumulative number of homes potentially being considered across Ashley, Rostherne and Mobberley.
2. The resulting additional population.
3. The number of primary and secondary-age children generated.
4. Where those children would realistically attend school.
5. Whether a new secondary school in Cheshire East is required.
6. The additional requirement for SEND places.
7. GP and NHS dental capacity.
8. Police, Fire & Rescue and ambulance-service capacity.

9. Additional traffic entering South Trafford.
10. The effect upon Hale, Hale Barns, Bowdon and Altrincham.
11. Rail capacity and the effect of additional train movements upon the Hale level crossing.
12. Bus and wider public-transport capacity.
13. Drainage, sewage and utility capacity.
14. Flood risk.
15. The cumulative impact upon the Green Belt and the physical separation between Trafford and Cheshire communities.

For every material item of new infrastructure, the evidence should answer five basic questions:

What is required? Who will pay for it? Where will it be located? When will it be operational? How many homes may be occupied before it must be delivered?

Conclusion

Trafford Conservatives recognise the need for new housing and responsible planning for future growth.

But housing numbers cannot come first and infrastructure second.

The potential development around Ashley, together with development pressures affecting Rostherne and Mobberley, could have substantial consequences well beyond Cheshire East's administrative boundary.

Our most serious concern is secondary-school capacity.

Cheshire East must plan and provide the education infrastructure generated by development within its area. It would be unacceptable for substantial development immediately alongside Trafford to proceed on the assumption that already-pressured South Trafford schools will simply absorb the additional children.

The same principle applies to GPs, NHS dentists, Police, Fire & Rescue, roads, rail, drainage and other essential infrastructure.

We are also concerned that differing public descriptions of the Ashley submissions - from an initial approximately 250 homes, through the current approximately 1,070-home proposal, to the previously discussed 11,000-home longer-term scenario - have created understandable uncertainty. Cheshire East should provide clear and definitive information about which sites and development scenarios remain under consideration.

However, that uncertainty does not diminish our infrastructure concerns.

Even at approximately 1,100 homes, the cross-boundary consequences require serious examination.

The Hale level crossing provides a particularly clear illustration. Increased development may generate demand for more rail capacity, but additional rail movements could mean more frequent barrier closures, stopping road traffic through Hale and adding further pressure to an already constrained network.

Ashley cannot be considered separately from Rostherne and Mobberley, and Cheshire East cannot consider the consequences of these developments as though the boundary with Trafford were a wall.

Infrastructure first - not infrastructure eventually.

Where schools, healthcare, emergency services, transport, drainage and other infrastructure are necessary to support development, they must be secured, funded and delivered in advance of, or in step with, occupation.

Where that cannot be demonstrated, development should not proceed at that scale.

Existing residents in Trafford should not be expected to absorb the infrastructure consequences of development elsewhere which has not been properly planned.

Sources referenced

- Cheshire East Council - Local Plan site submissions: <https://localplan.cheshireeast.gov.uk/site-submissions>
- Cheshire East consultation representations - Ashley:
<https://oc2.cheshireeast.gov.uk/oc2connect/document/rep/217/12>
- Altrincham Today - Tatton Estate 1,000-home settlement report:
<https://altrincham.todaynews.co.uk/news/2026/08/06/revealed-tatton-estate-eyes-1-000-home-settlement-on-green-belt-at-ashley/>
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<https://altrincham.todaynews.co.uk/news/2026/08/27/ashley-campaigners-say-letter-proves-11-000-homes-still-on-table-but-tatton-insists-sites-now-withdrawn/>