

**Objection to Strategic Housing and Economic Land
Availability Assessment (SHELAA) Submission for Land at Ashley (Site Reference: 12
Contiguous Parcels Totalling 291.03 Hectares)**

For the attention of the Spatial Planning Team, Cheshire East Council

Dear Sirs,

I am writing to register a formal objection to allocating or considering the 291.03-hectare tract of land surrounding Ashley across all 12 contiguous parcels within the SHELAA and the broader Local Plan review. For clarity these are described on the Cheshire East Council Website Map (<https://cheshire-east.opus4.co.uk/planning/localplan/maps/cec-site-submissions#/center/53.3578,-2.3423/zoom/15/baselayer/b:31/layers/o:16032,o:16033,o:16034,o:16035,o:16036,o:16037,o:16038/lang/en-GB>) as "Ashley Garden Village [NE, NW, SE SW] Quadrant". The details of the site are in the table at the foot of this submission. Promoted development of this magnitude in this sensitive rural area is fundamentally unviable and directly violates statutory local policy and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

1. Green Belt Protection and "Grey Belt" Disqualification

The whole of Ashley Parish is designated as Protected Wash-Over Designation (CELPS Policy PG 3) This designation as "wash-over" Green Belt is designed to preserve the open, rural character of sensitive villages and is the highest category green belt.

Ashley forms the narrowest remaining countryside buffer separating Greater Manchester (the metropolitan borough of Trafford) from Cheshire East (principally the rural town of Knutsford and the village of Mobberley). Under Policy GB2 and Policy GB6, allocating this site fails the national tests set out in Annex E by driving urban sprawl (Purpose A) and merging distinct settlements (Purpose B). Allowing any development would promote settlement coalescence, in violation of the stated policies.

Under Policy GB7, "Grey Belt" land must not strongly contribute to core Green Belt purposes. This contiguous tract of active farmland performs critical Green Belt functions. While the updated NPPF removes the former Footnote 7 threshold from the initial Grey Belt qualification test, significant heritage, ecological, and flood constraints across the site remain decisive barriers to development under broader national policies. Thus, this development fails to meet the "Grey Belt" transfer criteria.

Currently, HS2 Ltd. has around 50 acres of Ashley safeguarded for the proposed HS3 train line route (also known as: Northern Powerhouse Rail/Network North/Northern Arch/Leeds - Liverpool train line route). The HS2 Ltd. safeguarded land borders all of the southern boundary of the "Ashley Garden Village [NE, NW, SE SW] Quadrant".

2. Loss of Best and Most Versatile (BMV) Agricultural Farmland

Detailed soil assessments, including survey data from HS2 Phase 2b, confirm that this 291.03 hectare site consists predominantly of Grade 2 and Subgrade 3a Best and Most Versatile (BMV) farmland. This makes the farmland of Ashley particularly valuable as an agricultural resource and should be preserved for food production.

Concrete development across this uninterrupted, productive agricultural landscape directly undermines regional food production, violating CELPS Policy SE 2 and national soil protection. This policy mandates the requiring of local planning authorities to prioritize lower-grade or brownfield land in preference to BMV farmland.

3. Highway Safety Hazards, Rail Deficits, and Aviation Restrictions

Policy GB7 introduces specific support for higher-density development near "well-connected" railway stations. To qualify under this policy, a station must offer at least 4 services per hour (or 2 per hour in one direction). Ashley station fails this test completely, operating on a maximum of 1 train per hour with only a four vehicle commuter car park. Service levels will worsen further following the funded, approved station at Cheadle; in March 2026, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport Keir Mather MP confirmed that service reallocations reducing Ashley and Plumley calls to one train every two hours are necessary to accommodate Cheadle's stops (Hansard; Cheadle Train Station - Volume 782: debated on Wednesday 18 March 2026).

Most of the trains that stop in Ashley are a two-carriage unit, those that are a four-carriage unit have their fourth carriage locked up and out of use, due to some station platforms along this line, including Ashley, being too short to accommodate them.

Local rural infrastructure cannot accommodate heavy vehicular traffic. The network relies on narrow, single-lane bridge pinch points over the railway (2 places), the River Bollin (this bridge has a Grade: II listing. List Entry Number: 1329654), and Birkin Brook, creating severe cumulative congestion risks in violation of CELPS Policy CO 1, Policy CO 4, and national transport safety policies. The narrow, rural roads cannot accommodate a significant volume increase in traffic. In addition, brine extraction causes occurrences of road "slumping" where the carriageway dips away to the gutter as the road sinks into the void below. Additional traffic will speed this process.

Positioned beneath Manchester Airport's operational flight paths, the site falls within restricted noise contours and bird-strike management zones, conflicting with aerodrome safety requirements and CELPS Policy SE 12 regarding public health.

Traffic from events held at Ashley showground, Stocks Farm Barn, Ashley Cricket Club and St. Elizabeth's Church and Community centre area space exit onto these narrow, rural roads. Some of the traffic from events held at Tatton Park also exit through/via Ashley too. When there are traffic problems on the A556, A538, M56 or M6, vehicles use roads in Ashley to avoid the traffic problems on these roads.

Most of the roads in Ashley have no pavements, and of those that do have pavements, most of them are narrow and overgrown. Most of the roads in Ashley have cycle routes and/or bridleways signed and marked along them. Cycle clubs from throughout Cheshire and Greater Manchester use these routes.

4. Adverse Impacts on Landscape, Ecology, and Cultural Heritage

Allocating these sites would permanently damage the settings of both the Bollin Valley and Parklands Local Landscape Designation (LLD) and the Rostherne/Tatton Park LLD, violating CELPS Policy SE 4. This will degrade the landscape and should not be permitted.

Mass construction would sever critical habitat corridors and imperil nearby sensitive ecological assets, including the Cotterill Clough SSSI/Nature Reserve, breaching CELPS Policy SE 3 and national nature recovery mandates. Permitting ecological fragmentation should not be permitted. In the site under consideration, three species on the "Red List" of the 5th revision of Birds of Conservation Concern (RSPB: 332-00738-20-21), namely Greenfinch, Grey Partridge and Tree Sparrow are in residence throughout the year.

The open fields frame the settings for 19 Grade II listed structures, including Ashley Hall. Allocating this site violates statutory requirements under CELPS Policy SE 7 and national heritage policies that require local authorities to give great weight to conserving designated historic assets and their rural settings. Permitting development will cause irreversible heritage damage.

Ashley has around 120 homes in it, with a population of around 250. This scale of development (proposed addition of 250 to 1000 to 11,000 new homes) would fundamentally alter the landscape. Such a development would permanently change the rural character of the area and could effectively extend the Greater Manchester urban sprawl into the Cheshire countryside.

Ashley has no street lighting, and most of the residents think of Ashley as a 'dark sky' village. Additional infrastructure will include street lighting and bring light pollution which disrupts the natural behaviours of nocturnal wildlife; affecting their reproduction, feeding, and navigation, which can lead to population declines. This is particularly harmful to species like bats and various insects that rely on darkness for survival.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs says light pollution is "a source of annoyance to people, harmful to wildlife and undermines enjoyment of the countryside or the night sky, especially in areas with intrinsically dark landscapes" (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, 'Artificial light in the environment: Policy update', December 2013, p 2. PB14108).

A 2023 report by the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee on the effects of artificial light and noise on human health found they "contribute to a range of adverse health outcomes, including heart disease and premature death" (House of Lords Science and Technology Committee, 'The neglected pollutants: The effects of artificial light and noise on human health', 19 July 2023, HL Paper 232 of session 2022-23, p 2.)

The report by the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee on the effects of artificial light and noise on human health, also used reference from Natural History Museum "Humans, birds and several other animals are finding it increasingly challenging to experience night-time uninterrupted by artificial light" (Natural History Museum, 'Bye-bye dark sky: Is light pollution costing us more than just the night-time?', accessed 24 April 2024.)

The Girl Guides have an activity centre and camp site in Ashley, their activities include Bee, Butterfly and Ladybird Challenges, all these insects' habitats would be threatened by the proposed infrastructure.

Farms and small businesses operate from and in Ashley, some of these are under threat of being built over by this proposed land submission. The new business units being proposed may be unaffordable for the current small businesses to either rent or buy.

5. Hydrological Risks, Drainage, and Infrastructure Inadequacies

Paving over this catchment area would dramatically increase surface water run-off into the River Bollin, creating severe off-site flood risks in breach of CELPS Policy SE 13 and national flood resilience policies. As previously noted, the land is partially unstable due to brine extraction, causing "road slumping" and the formation of "flashes". Examples of both these phenomena are present throughout the site and will require extensive mitigation plans in order to facilitate developments, and will present an ongoing issue to drainage, utilities and foundations.

The local area lacks the sewer system capacity, power grid infrastructure, and drainage networks needed for intensive growth, failing the deliverability requirements of CELPS Policy IN 1. Obstacles to overcoming these deficiencies are noted above. Ashley currently experiences around four power cuts a year, demonstrating the fragility of the infrastructure.

There are only four Household waste recycling centres in Cheshire East. One of these is in Knutsford. With the addition of the new housing in Knutsford, along with the proposed land submission for housing in Ashley, along with Mobberley, High Legh and other surrounding areas all these extra homes and businesses would make Knutsford waste recycling centre not large enough to accommodate the additional waste these homes and businesses would generate.

6. Invalidation under Spatial Strategy and Settlement Hierarchy

Under CELPS Policy PG 2, Ashley sits at the lowest tier of the settlement hierarchy, lacking the primary schools, local healthcare facilities, and job markets required to support a strategic population influx. It should additionally be noted that the local Primary Care Trust - East Cheshire NHS Trust is particularly struggling to accommodate the current needs of the local population, especially so since the recent large developments of housing around Knutsford and Wilmslow, neither of which included the construction or provision of additional care facilities.

Directing strategic housing to an isolated rural village, conflicts with CELPS Policy SD 1 and Policy SD 2, as well as national plan-making principles that mandate concentrating major developments within Tier 1 Principal Towns and Tier 2 Key Service Centres.

The map submitted also includes; the village playground, the car park for St. Elizabeth's Church and Community area, the schools playing field, playground and car park, and Ashley Cricket Clubs grounds and car park. The loss of these facilities will represent a significant loss of amenity within the rural setting of Ashley.

7. Invalidity of submitted map of the site

The map submitted to the Call for Sites, and now being commented on here, is fundamentally flawed. The map submitted by Tatton Estates includes plots of land over which they have no jurisdiction (public roads, public paths, bridleways &c.) and land which they do not own or control.

Conclusion and Action Requested

The submission across all 12 contiguous parcels (totalling 291.03 hectares) fails every fundamental planning test under both local policies and the current NPPF framework. I formally request that Cheshire East Council mark all 12 site submissions as Unsuitable, Unavailable, and Undeliverable within the SHELAA report and exclude them entirely from future Local Plan allocations.

Site Description Table from Map on CEC Website

Quadrant	Name	Address	Size (Ha)	Source
South East	Ashley Garden Village SE quadrant	Castle Mill Lane/Back Lane/Tanyard Lane, Ashley	73.62	HE 320c
South East	Land South East of Tanyard Lane	Tanyard Lane, Ashley	4.55	CFS26 565
South East	Land east of Mobberley Road	Mobberley Road/Back Lane, Ashley, WA15 0QH	6.77	CFS26 564, HE 317
South East	Land west of Mobberley Road	Mobberley Road, Ashley, WA15 0QW	5.32	HE 318, CFS26 572
South East	Land north of Back Lane, Ashley (04)	Land north of Back Lane, Ashley	5.26	HE 316, CFS26 558
South East	Land between Cow Lane and Tanyard Farm	Cow Lane/Tanyard Lane, Ashley, WA15 0QT	9.59	CFS26 548, HE 315
South East	Land west of Cow Lane	Cow Lane, Ashley, WA15 0QS	2.56	HE 314, CFS26 540
South West	Ashley Garden Village SW quadrant	Ashley Road, Ashley	50.93	HE 320d
South West	Land south of Ashley Road	Ashley Road, Ashley, WA14 3QF	6.57	HE 319, CFS26 562
South West	Land north of Ashley Road	Ashley Road, Ashley, WA14 3QE	4.01	HE 313, CFS26 533
North West	Ashley Garden Village NW quadrant	Ashley Road, Ashley	79.18	HE 320a
North East	Ashley Garden Village NE quadrant	Ashley Road/Cow Lane, Ashley	42.67	HE 320b