

To: Spatial Planning Team, Cheshire East Council

Subject: Formal Objection to SHELAA Land Submission: 291.03-Hectare Area around Ashley (12 adjoining sites)

Formal Representation

I am writing to formally submit my objection regarding the inclusion and assessment of the 291.03-hectare land submission around Ashley within the Cheshire East Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) and the ongoing Local Plan review (comprising 12 contiguous sites totalling 291.03 hectares).

This land allocation is fundamentally inappropriate for strategic scale development. The detailed planning policy justifications outlined below demonstrate how this submission directly conflicts with established national and local planning frameworks.

1. Conflict with Spatial Strategy & Sustainable Settlement Hierarchy

- **Lowest Settlement Ranking:** Under Policy PG 2 (Settlement Hierarchy) of the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy (CELPS), Ashley is categorized at the lowest tier. The village lacks essential local infrastructure, including primary school capacity, healthcare facilities, and local employment opportunities required to sustain housing growth.
- **Failure of Sustainable Location Principles:** Promoting major growth in a rural location that lacks high-frequency public transport directly violates CELPS Policy SD 1 (Sustainable Development in Cheshire East), CELPS Policy SD 2, and Chapter 2 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which explicitly dictate that growth must be focused toward Tier 1 Principal Towns and Tier 2 Key Service Centres.

2. Incompatibility with Green Belt Policy & Failure to Meet "Grey Belt" Exceptions

- **"Wash-Over" Green Belt Status:** The entire parish of Ashley carries a "wash-over" Green Belt designation under CELPS Policy PG 3 (Green Belt). This classification provides strict protection aimed at safeguarding the open and rural character of settlements enveloped by countryside.
- **Essential Strategic Buffer:** Ashley operates as the narrowest remaining countryside buffer separating Greater Manchester (Trafford/Hale/Altrincham) from Cheshire East settlements (Mobberley/Knutsford). Developing this site would directly breach core Green Belt functions set out in Paragraph 143 of the NPPF—specifically Purpose (a) to check unrestricted urban sprawl, Purpose (b) to prevent neighbouring towns from merging, and Purpose (c) to safeguard the countryside from encroachment.
- **Ineligibility for "Grey Belt" Reclassification:** Under national guidance, Green Belt land can only be released if it qualifies as "Grey Belt" (previously developed land or land making a negligible contribution to Green Belt purposes). The productive, open farmland across Ashley strongly fulfils Green Belt functions and is further disqualified under NPPF Footnote 7 due to statutory environmental, heritage, and agricultural constraints.

3. Transport Infrastructure Deficits, Highway Safety & Aviation Safeguarding

- **Inadequate Rail Connections:** Ashley train station cannot be considered a well-connected transit hub. It currently operates at a low frequency of just one train per hour in each direction at maximum. Furthermore, with the proposed new station at Cheadle now likely to proceed, service models indicate that Ashley's service frequency could be reduced further to just one train every two hours, rendering it wholly incapable of supporting sustainable commuter demand.
- **Physical Network Constraints & Bridge Bottlenecks:** The local highway network surrounding Ashley consists of narrow rural lanes and significant structural pinch points. Severe physical limitations are created by narrow bridges across the area—not only over the railway line, but also crossing the River Bollin and smaller watercourses such as Birkin Brook. The substantial traffic volumes generated by a housing development would cause severe cumulative network congestion and acute road safety risks, in direct conflict with CELPS Policy CO 1 (Sustainable Travel and Transport), Policy CO 4, and NPPF Paragraph 115.
- **Statutory Airport Safeguarding Constraints:** The site lies directly beneath operational noise contours and bird-strike hazard zones for Manchester Airport. Placing high-density residential development in this location breaches statutory aerodrome safeguarding protocols and CELPS Policy SE 12 (Pollution and Land Instability) regarding public safety and noise exposure.

4. Severe Loss of Best and Most Versatile (BMV) Agricultural Land

- **Soil Quality & Food Production:** Agricultural land classifications (including dataset findings from HS2 Phase 2b) confirm that the submission consists of Grade 2 and Subgrade 3a Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land. Rather than fragmented pockets, the site forms an unbroken, contiguous area of high-grade farmland vital for regional food security.
- **Direct Policy Violation:** Both national policy (NPPF Paragraph 180) and local policy (CELPS Policy SE 2: Efficient Use of Land) strictly mandate the preservation of high-grade agricultural land for food production, requiring development to be directed to brownfield or lower-quality land first.

5. Unacceptable Environmental, Landscape & Heritage Impacts

- **Landscape Degradation:** Allocating this site would destroy the landscape setting of the Bollin Valley and Parklands Local Landscape Designation (LLD) as well as the Rostherne/Tatton Park LLD, violating CELPS Policy SE 4 (The Landscape).
- **Ecological Harm:** Development would sever connected wildlife corridors and jeopardize sensitive natural habitats, including the Cotterill Clough Nature Reserve / SSSI, conflicting with CELPS Policy SE 3 (Biodiversity and Geodiversity) and NPPF Paragraphs 180–185.

- **Impact on Heritage Assets:** The area contains the settings of 19 Grade II listed structures (including Ashley Hall). CELPS Policy SE 7 (The Historic Environment) and Chapter 16 of the NPPF (Paragraphs 200–208) require that great weight be placed on preserving designated heritage assets and their landscape settings.

6. Hydrological, Drainage & Utility Constraints

- **Surface Water & Flood Risks:** The area lacks deep foul sewerage infrastructure, main electrical grid capacity, and adequate surface water drainage. Large-scale development would significantly increase surface water flood risks within the River Bollin catchment, breaching CELPS Policy SE 13 (Flood Risk and Water Management) and NPPF Chapter 14 (Paragraphs 165–175).
- **Utility Infrastructure Deficits:** Contrary to CELPS Policy IN 1 (Infrastructure), candidate sites must prove that deliverable utility infrastructure can be supplied without causing off-site environmental degradation.

Conclusion & Formal Request

This 291.03-hectare proposal (spanning 12 adjoining sites) fails to comply with virtually every major planning constraint metric. It contradicts the local spatial strategy, fails national Green Belt tests, relies on inadequate transport and utility infrastructure, destroys high-grade agricultural land, and causes severe harm to protected historic and natural landscapes.

I formally request that Cheshire East Council classify all 12 submissions within this 291.03-hectare site as **Unsuitable, Unavailable, and Undeliverable** in the SHELAA assessment and exclude them from future Local Plan allocations.