

Places background paper - introduction

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1 Background

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1.1 The Local Plan is a key document that shapes how land use and places will change and develop in the future. The Council adopted the Local Plan (Part One) Strategic Policies in 2015 and the Local Plan (Part Two) Land Allocations and Detailed Policies in 2019.

1.2 In July 2013 a key service centre background paper was prepared to provide evidence to support the identification of Key Service Centres as sustainable locations for the growth identified in the Local Plan (Part One) Strategic Policies. The background paper assessed the relative sustainability of settlements within the borough and identified the availability of services and facilities within settlements at a point in time.

1.3 The methodology reflected the Government's sustainability theme of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and responses received through extensive consultation. In determining the list of key service centres and associated levels of housing development identified within the policies of the Local Plan, each settlement was assessed against their levels of access to services and facilities, public transport, employment areas and opportunities, infrastructure capacity and any policy or physical constraints which could affect the levels of proposed development.

1.4 This Places Background Paper (Draft) updates the assessments for the following settlements and will be a 'living' document which will be kept under review and up to date.

Urban Areas: Chester, Ellesmere Port, Northwich, Winsford

Key Service Centres: Cuddington and Sandiway, Farndon, Frodsham, Helsby, Kelsall, Malpas, Neston and Parkgate, Tarporley, Tarvin, Tattenhall.

2 Introduction

2.1 Having a strong understanding of the nature of the towns, villages and smaller settlements in Cheshire West and Chester (CWaC) is a key part of our evidence base and assists with forming a robust strategy for the future of our borough and the new Local Plan.

2.2 This Places Background Paper (Draft) looks at the larger settlements in the borough to provide an understanding of how well residents' everyday needs are met living in a particular area. It will also give an indication of what might help us to facilitate thriving and healthy communities through the policies of the Local Plan. To do this we need to understand the profile of settlements and the level of services and infrastructure available. The assessment will look at topics such as population, households, employment provision, retail services, education facilities and availability and quality of transport connections.

3 Role of the Places background paper

3 Role of the Places background paper

3.1 The aims of producing this paper are to:

- Provide an up-to-date picture of the services and infrastructure in the larger settlements across the borough;
- Inform a hierarchy of settlements based upon the current level of provision of services and facilities, and the role that the settlement plays in the borough;
- Inform the settlement strategy for the new Local Plan, influencing how and where any identified development needs are met across the borough;
- Establish an evidence base, that can assist in identifying service or facilities shortages which may help to justify contributions from any new developments.

3.2 This work is based on an analysis of the presence of a range of services within the borough's larger settlements which act as indicators of the sustainability of a settlement. These services include shops, education and community/leisure facilities, health services and access to public transport.

3.3 Other issues affecting the potential suitability of a settlement for additional development have also been assessed including natural and built environment designations and constraints, flood risk, employment opportunities and highway, health and education infrastructure constraints.

3.4 We have prepared this assessment based on desktop survey work, largely using available datasets, internet searches, Census data via the Office for National Statistics (ONS) website, liaison with internal Council departments and our Geographical Information Systems (GIS) mapping tools.

4 Policy context

4.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (December 2024) sets out the government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied. It provides a framework within which locally prepared plans for housing and other development can be produced. National Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) is an extensive online resource of detailed policy guidance which along with the NPPF sets out how the government envisages the day to day working of the planning system in England to operate.

4.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that planning policies and decisions should play an active role in guiding development towards sustainable solutions, taking local circumstances into account, to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area.

4.3 Significant development should be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes. This can help to reduce congestion and emissions and improve air quality and public health. However, opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas, and this should be taken into account in both plan-making and decision-making.

4.4 The PPG states "Strategic policy-making authorities can work with public health leads and health organisations to understand and take account of the current and projected health status and needs of the local population, including the quality and quantity of and accessibility to, healthcare and the effect any planned growth may have on this. Authorities will also need to assess the quality and quantity of, and accessibility to, green infrastructure, education, sports, recreation and places of worship..."

4.5 These aspects of national policy suggest that indicators of service provision and accessibility should be considered, and the role of different settlements in Cheshire West and Chester are taken into account when preparing a Local Plan.

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Socio-economic profiles

Population

5.1 The size of a settlement clearly plays a part in its significance and in general terms the larger the population the more likely it is to have a range of services and facilities brought about by a larger demand. A matter to be considered in detail whilst progressing the preparation of the new Local Plan is the relationship between the overall population and the number of services and facilities available and whether these are sufficient to meet the needs and demands of that population.

Age Profile

5.2 Used to give an indication of the different age ranges in each settlement and if there is a concentration of one group. This may help to indicate the types of housing and services and facilities which are needed in the future.

Travel to work

5.3 The Census data can be used to understand the travel to work patterns. This provides an indication of how far people travel to work, where the key employment opportunities are found, the level of self-containment of each settlement and the relationship between settlements.

Other Outputs

5.4 Including the number of households, housing composition, economic activity and occupations which will be used to assess the social composition of each of the settlements.

For the purposes of data collection, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Census 2021 (Build a Custom Area Profile) tool has been used. For most of the settlements, the ‘built up area’ profile was selected which was a best fit to the existing Local Plan settlement boundaries. The data and boundaries displayed in this profile are aggregated from small areas on a best-fit basis, and therefore may differ slightly from other sources.

The following link provides more information on this tool:

<https://digitalblog.ons.gov.uk/2023/01/17/custom-profiles/>

Table 5.1 Socio-economic profile

Topic	Definition
Population	The number of people on Census Day, 21 March 2021.
Age profile	A person’s age on Census Day, 21 March 2021 in England and Wales. Infants aged under 1 year are classified as 0 years of age. Used to give an indication of the different age ranges in each settlement and if there is a concentration of one group. This may help to indicate the types of housing and services and facilities which are needed in the future.

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Topic	Definition
Number of households	A "household" is (current definition, from 2011) one person living alone, or a group of people (not necessarily related) living at the same address who share cooking facilities and share a living room, sitting room or dining area. A household can consist of a single family, more than one family or no families in the case of a group of unrelated people.
Household size	The number of people in the household. Visitors staying at an address do not count to that household's size.
Household composition	Households according to the relationships between members. One-family households are classified by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the number of dependent children family type (married, civil partnership or cohabiting couple family, or lone parent family) Other households are classified by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the number of people the number of dependent children whether the household consists only of students or only of people aged 66 and over
Accommodation type	The type of building or structure used or available by an individual or household. This could be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the whole house or bungalow a flat, maisonette or apartment a temporary or mobile structure, such as a caravan
Number of bedrooms	The number of bedrooms in a household's accommodation. This number is not available for household spaces with no usual residents.
Tenure of household	Whether a household owns or rents the accommodation that it occupies. Owner-occupied accommodation can be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> owned outright, which is where the household owns all of the accommodation with a mortgage or loan part-owned on a shared ownership scheme Rented accommodation can be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> private rented, for example, rented through a private landlord or letting agent social rented through a local council or housing association
Economic activity status	People aged 16 years and over are economically active if, between 15 March and 21 March 2021, they were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> in employment (an employee or self-employed)

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Topic	Definition
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> unemployed, but looking for work and could start within two weeks unemployed, but waiting to start a job that had been offered and accepted
Employment history	<p>Classifies people who were not in employment on Census Day into:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> not in employment: Worked in the last 12 months not in employment: Not worked in the last 12 months not in employment: Never worked
Occupation	<p>Classifies what people aged 16 years and over do as their main job. Their job title or details of activities they do in their job and any supervisory or management responsibilities form this classification. This information is used to code responses to an occupation using the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) 2020.</p>
Number of cars or vans	<p>The number of cars or vans owned or available for use by household members.</p> <p>Vehicles included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> pick-ups, camper vans and motor homes vehicles that are temporarily not working vehicles that have failed their MOT vehicles owned or used by a lodger company cars or vans if they're available for private use <p>Vehicles not included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> motorbikes, trikes, quad bikes or mobility scooters vehicles that have a Statutory Off Road Notification (SORN) vehicles owned or used only by a visitor vehicles that are kept at another address or not easily accessed
Distance travelled to work	<p>The distance, in kilometres, between a person's residential postcode and their workplace postcode measured in a straight line. A distance travelled of 0.1km indicates that the workplace postcode is the same as the residential postcode. Distances over 1200km are treated as invalid, and an imputed or estimated value is added.</p> <p>"Work mainly at or from home" is made up of those that ticked either the "Mainly work at or from home" box for the address of workplace question, or the "Work mainly at or from home" box for the method of travel to work question.</p> <p>Distance is calculated as the straight line distance between the enumeration postcode and the workplace postcode.</p>
Method of travel to workplace	<p>A person's place of work and their method of travel to work. "Work mainly from home" applies to someone who indicated their place of work as their home address and travelled to work by driving a car or van, for example visiting clients.</p>

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Availability of services and facilities**Background**

5.5 The purpose of this section is to ensure that sustainable locations for new development are identified through the new Local Plan. National planning policy seeks to direct development to the most sustainable locations, which contain a variety of services and community facilities and where public transport services exist. As a starting point, we are undertaking an assessment of settlements to understand their sustainability, in terms of what local services are available locally within communities, and how accessible they are to a wider range of services.

NPPF guidance on key aspects of sustainability, local services and amenities:

5.6 Achieving Sustainable Development- A social objective – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being.

5.7 Supporting a prosperous rural economy - Promote the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship.

5.8 Promoting Sustainable Transport - The planning system should actively manage patterns of growth.....Significant development should be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes. However, opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas, and this should be taken into account in both plan-making and decision-making.

5.9 Promoting Healthy Communities - To provide the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies and decisions should: plan positively for the provision and use of shared spaces, community facilities (such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments, guard against the unnecessary loss of valued facilities and services, particularly where this would reduce the community's ability to meet its day-to-day needs; ensure an integrated approach to considering the location of housing, economic uses and community facilities and services.

5.10 Promoting Healthy Communities - The Government attaches great importance to ensuring that a sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new communities. Local planning authorities should take a proactive, positive and collaborative approach to meeting this requirement, and to development that will widen choice in education.

5.11 Promoting Healthy Communities - Access to a network of high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities, and can deliver wider benefits for nature and support efforts to address climate change.

5.12 Planning Practice Guidance (Plan Making): "Strategic policy-making authorities can work with public health leads and health organisations to understand and take account of the current and projected health status and needs of the local population, including the quality and quantity of and accessibility to, healthcare and the effect any planned growth may have on this. Authorities will also need to assess

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the quality and quantity of, and accessibility to, green infrastructure, education, sports, recreation and places of worship...”

Based on the policy guidance above, the following community services and facilities have been assessed:

Table 5.2 Community services and facilities

Category	Sub Category	Service or Facility	Source
Social and community infrastructure	Education	Nursery	GIS
		Primary School	
		Secondary School	
		Special Needs Education	
		College/Further Education	
		Higher/University Education	
	Health:	Doctor's Surgery	https://www.nhs.uk/about-us/nhs-website-datasets/
		Care Homes	
		Hospital	
		Dentist	
		Pharmacy	
		Opticians	
	Community	Community Centres and Village Halls	GIS Internal Licensing records
		Library	
		Places of Worship	
		Pubs and restaurants	
	Culture/ Entertainment	Theatre	GIS
		Cinema	
		Museum/Gallery	
	Sport and Leisure	Playing Pitches	CWaC Open Space Study – GIS
		Local Play/Equipped Play Areas	

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Category	Sub Category	Service or Facility	Source
		Leisure Centre/Swimming Pool	
Green Infrastructure	Health and Social	Parks and Gardens	CWaC Open Space Study – GIS
		Amenity Green Space	CWaC - GIS
		Allotments	
		Local Green Space (identified through Neighbourhood Plans)	
Services and Retail	Economy	Post Office	https://www.postoffice.co.uk/branch-finder
		Local Shop/Convenience Store	Retail Monitoring/GIS
		Comparison Goods e.g. clothes and household goods	
		Supermarket	
		Primary Shopping Areas	
		Local Retail Centres	

Access to services and facilities

5.13 The availability of public transport, access to employment, the existence of infrastructure and policy and land use constraints also need to be considered in order to build a comprehensive picture of a place. These additional factors are discussed further in the following chapters.

Local Retail Centres (LRCs)

5.14 LRCs in the borough have been surveyed (Spring/Summer 2023) to ascertain the 'health' of the centres in terms of vacancy rates compared to the previous year. A commentary is provided on the 'health' and retail offer in each settlement and a breakdown of the commercial goods type (2022) is provided in a graph (e.g. comparison, convenience, leisure uses).

Town centre vacancy rates

5.15 The borough's town centres were also surveyed in Spring/Summer 2023 to assess the number of vacancies. The data is shown in the following table:

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Table 5.3 Retail vacancies

Ranking	Centre	Total units	Total vacant units	Vacancy rate (%)	% difference 2022
	Chester	588	92	15.65	-3.05
	Northwich	204	26	12.75	-5.82
	Ellesmere Port	171	37	21.64	0.25
	Winsford	58	17	29.31	10.34
	Neston	89	11	12.36	-2.08
	Frodsham	137	11	8.03	0.94
Total		1247	194	15.56	

5.16 Chester, Northwich and Neston have seen an improved vacancy rate compared with 2022, with Northwich vacancies the lowest since 2010. Ellesmere Port, Frodsham and Winsford have seen an increased vacancy rate, with Winsford seeing a significant increase at the highest rate since 2010.

Employment opportunities

5.17 The provision of employment opportunities within a settlement is important, as it provides people with the opportunity to live and work in the same area, reducing the need to travel by car. Local employment opportunities also provide a positive indicator of vibrant and sustainable settlements.

5.18 The presence of employment offers the potential for a settlement to be more sustainable if there is a reasonable source of employment including business, office, light industrial, and storage and distribution. Furthermore, local businesses can provide economic benefits to their local community as employees may spend more within the area, consequently helping to maintain local shops and services.

5.19 Employment areas are identified and mapped from the employment hierarchy in the Employment Land Study 2013, and the initial long list of areas included in the Draft Employment Areas Survey 2023. The number of jobs within the settlement and the number of active workers has also been assessed.

Job densities

5.20 Some Cheshire West and Chester wards have relatively high concentrations of employment, whilst others do not. These concentrations (or lack of them) can be measured by jobs densities: that is, the ratio of employment to the resident working-age (age 16 to 64) population. High jobs densities tend to indicate locations that are net importers of labour (i.e. with a net inflow of commuters); low densities tend to indicate locations that are net exporters of labour (i.e. with a net outflow of commuters). The job densities for the borough's settlements are shown in the table below. Chester, Winsford and Tarporley have the highest job densities indicating that these settlements are the net importers of labour.⁽ⁱ⁾

i Source: Number of jobs: BRES: Business Register and Employment Survey, Total: All usual: Census 2021, Economically Active: Census 2022, Economically Inactive: Census 2023. The settlement areas are based on a bespoke Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) built up from Output Areas using population weighted centroids, which is the best fit model.

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Table 5.4 Job densities

Settlement	Jobs (2021)	Economically active (excluding full-time students)	Economically inactive	Jobs less economically active population	Job density
Chester	43,305	41,275	29,003	2,030	1.05
Ellesmere Port	20,270	32,233	20,979	-11,963	0.63
Northwich	27,010	31,050	18,791	-4,040	0.87
Winsford	20,270	16,240	10,179	4,030	1.25
Cuddington & Sandiway	910	2,431	1,799	-1,521	0.37
Farndon	365	1,208	848	-843	0.3
Frodsham	3,225	5,087	4,136	-1,862	0.63
Helsby	1,395	2,696	1,704	-1,301	0.52
Kelsall	785	1,825	1,425	-1,040	0.43
Malpas	800	1,582	1,078	-782	0.51
Neston & Parkgate	4,325	6,898	6,654	-2,573	0.63
Tarporley	1,715	1,445	1,160	270	1.19
Tarvin	465	1,487	1,052	-1,022	0.31
Tattenhall	1,815	2,051	1,525	-236	0.88

Constraints – Natural/Built Environment

5.21 The Local Plan will also take account of policy and other constraints when making decisions on how to deliver sustainable development.

5.22 Key constraints which have been mapped for the purposes of this paper include:

- Flooding (as informed by the Council's Strategic Flood Risk Assessment);
- Green Belt
- Important areas of bio-diversity and important habitats (primarily protected areas,);
- Green Infrastructure/networks
- Areas of importance to the historic environment (including heritage assets such as Listed buildings, Conservation Areas and Scheduled Monuments).
- Landscape capacity
- Local Green Space
- Best and most versatile agricultural land

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Flooding

5.23 In line with the NPPF and PPG, all relevant development will be required to follow the sequential approach to determining the suitability of land for development, directing new development to areas at the lowest risk of flooding and where necessary application of the exception test. The NPPF states that inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding should be avoided by directing development away from areas at highest risk (whether existing or future). Where development is necessary in such areas, the development should be made safe for its lifetime without increasing flood risk elsewhere, and requires major developments to incorporate sustainable drainage systems.

Green Belt

5.24 The North Cheshire Green Belt is a major designation in the borough and covers 42% of the land area (39,230 hectares). Green Belt surrounds much of the area around the City of Chester and most of the land between Chester and Ellesmere Port and Chester and Northwich.

Biodiversity

5.25 The borough contains various sites and species which are protected as internationally, nationally and locally important. Statutory protected biodiversity (generally under international or national designations) are afforded the highest level of protection. Developments outside but adjacent to statutory sites or within their catchments may have an adverse impact on them. Local designations identify important sources of environmental, social and economic benefit at the community level and contribute to functioning ecological networks. Development should not result in any net loss of natural assets, and should seek to provide net gains. Where there is unavoidable loss or damage to habitats, sites or features because of exceptional overriding circumstances, mitigation and compensation will be required to ensure there is no net loss of environmental value. Cheshire West and Chester has 28 Sites of Special Scientific Interest; 443 Local Wildlife Sites; 39 Areas of Nature Conservation Value; 6 Local Nature Reserves; 6159 hectares of woodland and 31 Biodiversity Action Plan habitats. All environmental designations make up the borough's ecological network, which is made up of Core Areas, Corridors and Stepping Stones, Meres and Mosses catchments and sustainable land uses. The CWAC ecological network (July 2016): Ecological Network identifies the strategic priorities across the Borough where habitat needs to be maintained, restored or created to ensure a resilient ecological network.

Areas of importance to the historic environment

5.26 Areas of importance to the historic environment may constrain the ability of settlements to accommodate additional growth. Scheduled Monuments and other historic assets including archaeology listed on the Cheshire Historic Environment Record and their settings are key considerations that could influence development form. The borough contains a wealth of heritage assets of international, national and local significance including the walled city of Chester with its unique Row buildings, market towns and villages with the area's distinctive "black and white" architecture, as well as Georgian, Victorian and modern development. Across the borough there are currently (2022-23) 11,111 sites of archaeological/historic importance recorded on the Historic Environment Record.

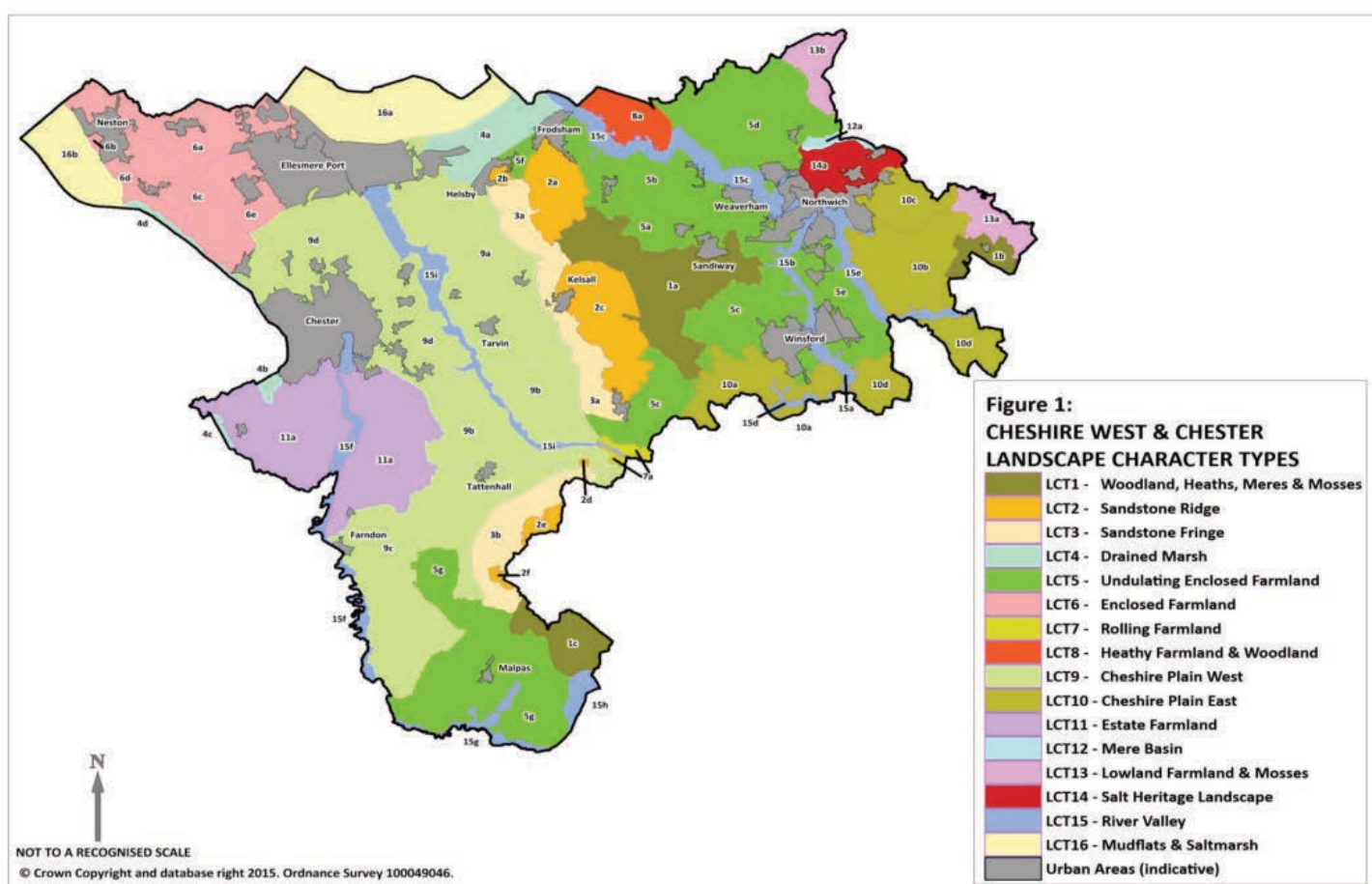
5.27 The canal network is a significant historic asset throughout the borough and contributes to its wealth of heritage assets. The historic environment of the canal network contributes to the character, heritage value and cultural identity throughout Cheshire West and Chester.

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Landscape Capacity

5.28 An assessment of the potential landscape sensitivity affecting future development potential around the settlement. Landscape character types (which are generic and share common combinations of geology, topography, vegetation and human influences, e.g. River Valleys) are combined with landscape character areas (which are single, discrete geographical areas of the landscape type with a unique 'sense of place'). There are sixteen different landscape character types in CWaC which reflect the unique character of the borough and within these character types, the landscape classification identifies 53 separate landscape character areas (Cheshire West and Chester Landscape Strategy (2016)).

Map 5.1 Landscape character types



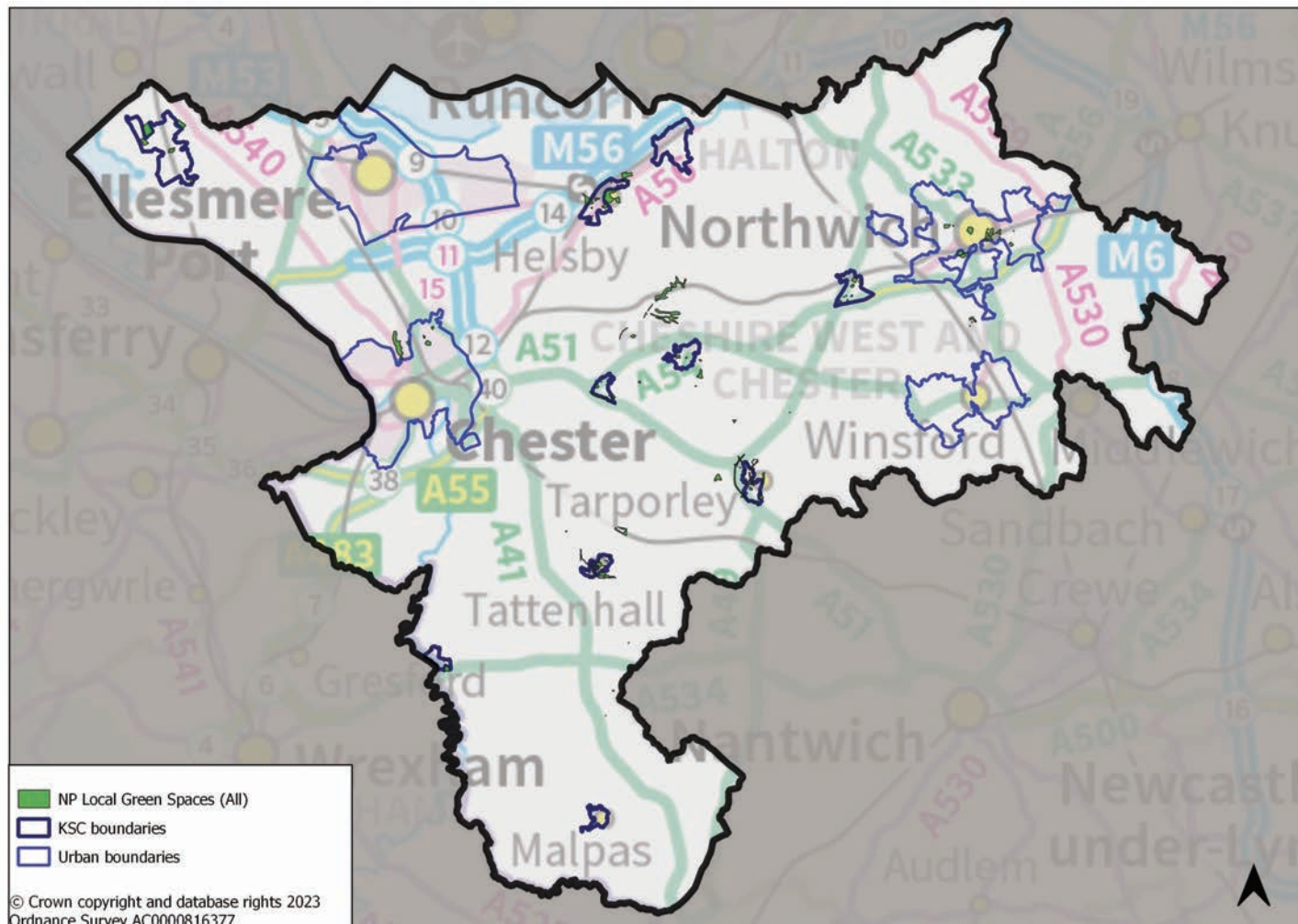
Local Green Spaces

5.29 The designation of land as Local Green Space through local and neighbourhood plans allows communities to identify and protect green areas of particular importance to them. Designating land as Local Green Space should be consistent with the local planning of sustainable development and complement investment in sufficient homes, jobs and other essential services. Local Green Spaces should only be designated when a plan is prepared or updated, and be capable of enduring beyond the end of the plan period. The Local Green Space designation should only be used where the green space is: a) in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves; b) demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and

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c) local in character and is not an extensive tract of land. Policies for managing development within a Local Green Space should be consistent with those for Green Belts.

Map 5.2 Neighbourhood plan local green spaces



Key Settlement Gaps (KSGs)

5.30 These were identified in the Local Plan (Part Two) as areas where it is necessary to safeguard the character and individuality of the settlements that form the wider built up area of Northwich. KSGs are important for maintaining the distinct and/or remaining separation between settlements, and in doing so, help to define settlement identity, character, sense of place or historic settlement form. Five key settlement gaps have been identified where the threat of coalescence or erosion of settlement identity is likely due to pressure from development. The network of key settlement gaps contributes towards protecting landscape character and distinctiveness:

- Lostock Gralam and Northwich
- Leftwich and Rudheath (Dane Valley)
- Davenham and Leftwich
- Davenham Village and Leftwich Grange (Kingsmead)
- Davenham and Moulton

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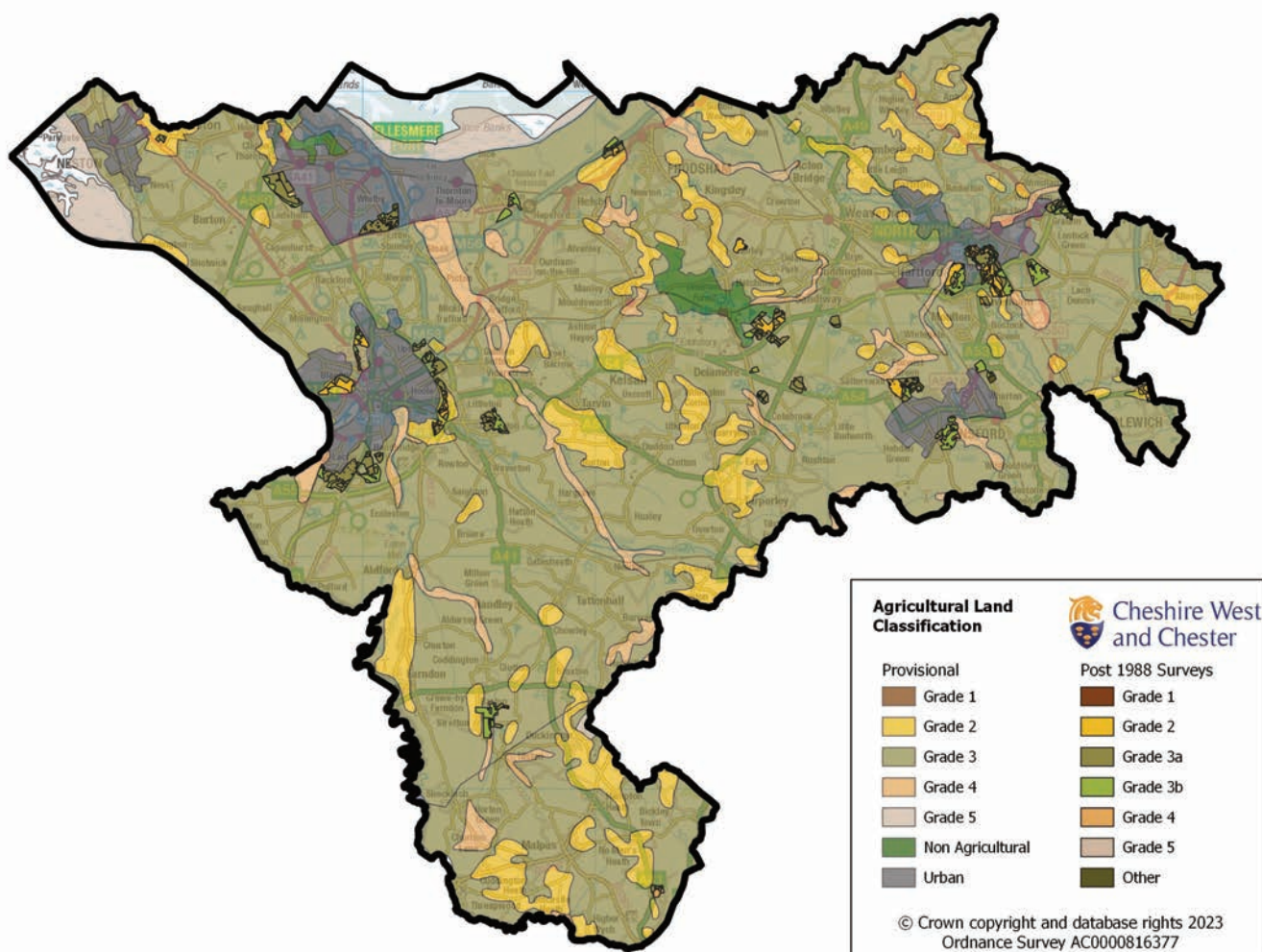
Strategic open space (Chester)

5.31 The Local Plan (Part Two) identified areas of strategic open space/corridors around Chester which were considered to be fundamental to the fabric, character and / or setting of Chester. They include large areas of open land with rural character which penetrate into the urban area, providing physical and visual links between the built environment and the countryside. More details on these areas are provided in the 'Chester' section of this paper.

Best and most versatile agricultural land

5.32 Agricultural Land Classifications are graded from 1 to 5. The highest grade goes to land that: gives a high yield or output, has the widest range and versatility of use, produces the most consistent yield and requires less input. The best and most versatile agricultural land is graded 1 to 3a.

Map 5.3 Agricultural Land classification

**Infrastructure**

5.33 The Local Plan will take account of current and potential infrastructure requirements.

5.34 This section focuses on areas of infrastructure including transport, education, health, utilities and digital infrastructure. This baseline should be seen as a snapshot of the situation in 2023, and the first step in the process of engaging with infrastructure providers & planning for infrastructure delivery.

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This baseline relies on existing published material (which it is acknowledged may cover broader geographies & different timeframes) in order to set the context and it is anticipated that there will be gaps in information available and/or presented at this stage and that there may be more up to date information not yet in the public domain that is not included. All infrastructure providers are encouraged to engage with the Local Plan preparation process at the earliest opportunity in order that full and up to date information can be taken into account.

Road

5.35 The Council is responsible for 328 km of Principal Road; 642 km of classified and 1359 km of unclassified road. A further 70 km of Motorway and Trunk Road including parts of the M6, M56, M53, A55 and A550 is managed by National Highways.

Public transport networks

5.36 Despite relatively low levels of public transport use, Cheshire West and Chester has a number of important strategic public transport linkages. It is serviced by a number of major rail lines and parts of the area benefit from relatively well used bus networks.

Rail

5.37 There are 21 rail stations within Cheshire West and Chester, with a wide offer in terms of destinations beyond the borough. The West Coast Main Line runs through the centre of the area. There are stations at Acton Bridge, Hartford and Winsford, but these are not served by Inter-City services to London or Scotland, for which a connection is needed at Crewe or Warrington Bank Quay.

Bus

5.38 The borough is served by around 50 routes, largely focused on Chester, Ellesmere Port, Northwich and Winsford – although the network is denser in the west than the east. The rural areas are served by considerably fewer and less frequent services, with many villages not served by any frequent bus services. There are no direct services between Winsford and Chester, or between Ellesmere Port and either Northwich or Winsford, and only an hourly service between Chester and Northwich. Bus routes with frequency and times have been included in the individual settlement assessments as well as the distance to higher order settlements and the times to travel using different modes of transport. The sources used for this information are provided below:

[Bus service timetables | Cheshire West and Chester Council](#)

<https://www.arrivabus.co.uk/>

<https://www.warringtonsownbuses.co.uk/>

[Google Maps](#)

[Plan Your Journey | Traveline](#)

Walking and cycling (active travel)

5.39 Department for Transport (2017/18) walking and cycling statistics show that Cheshire West has some of the highest levels of regular walking and cycling in the North-West. 13% of residents walk or cycle to work compared to 74% of residents use a car and 5% who use a bus. There is an extensive

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network of public rights of way and cycle routes. This includes a 1261 km Public Rights of Way network including 1088 km of public footpath and 88 km of bridleway. The National Cycle Network in the Borough is some 131km in length, while Regional Routes cover a further 217 km. Additional circular and traffic free routes extend the cycle network by a further 155 km. There are approximately 348km of cycleways in the Borough as well as 155km of additional traffic free routes including canal towpaths. There are a further 1,280km of Public Rights of Way (68% footpath, 7% bridleways and 1% byway open to all traffic).

Education

5.40 There are currently 190 educational establishments in the borough including one University (Chester), 1 sixth form college, 129 primary schools and 20 secondary schools. The majority of schools are in local -authority maintained schools but there are a number of private schools, free schools and academies. 60% of the borough's secondary schools are academies.

Health and wellbeing

5.41 Health and wellbeing can also be improved by access to various forms of green infrastructure, either for recreation or physical exercise. The Open Space Study (2017) provides an assessment of need of all accessible open space in the borough in terms of quality, quantity and access. The study then sets local open space standards based on this assessment. The study highlights deficiencies in provision in at least two open space typologies within each area profile, with deficiencies in youth play space in all areas. In addition, the Playing Pitch Strategy has just been updated (December 2023) and will provide up to date information about existing and future needs for all outdoor sport facilities in terms of quality, quantity, and location.

Energy networks

5.42 The SP Energy Networks application provides an indication of the potential opportunities to connect Distributed Generation to the HV, 33kV and 132kV network in the SP Manweb plc licence area. Category: Red – At least one factor is close to its operational limit and so installation of most levels of Distributed Generation and a local connection is highly unlikely. It may also require extensive reinforcement works or given the lack of a local connection, require an extensive amount of sole user assets to facilitate such a connection. The situation for Cheshire West is shown online:

[SPM Heat Map - SP Energy Networks](#)

Broadband

5.43 In CWaC at May 2023, 97.2% of residential and business premises had superfast broadband (over 30mbps) and 69.3% had gigabit-capable broadband. In 2018 only 4% of UK premises have access to full fibre. According to the UK Wireless Infrastructure Strategy (April 2023), a basic 5G signal was delivered for 77% of UK premises. However, coverage from all four operators is much lower, at approximately 20%.

Water supply and wastewater management

5.44 There are two water companies providing sewerage services within the borough: Dwr Cymru Welsh Water – Neston to Malpas areas, including Chester and Tattenhall and United Utilities - the eastern part of the Borough. The two water companies providing clean water within the borough are: Severn Trent Water – Chester area and United Utilities which serve the remainder of the borough.

5 Assessment criteria

5.45 Water Resource Management Plans (WRMPs) are prepared by water companies to ensure supply continues to meet demand into the future, even under water stressed conditions. WRMPs cover 25-year planning periods to ensure that long term needs, trends and changes are considered appropriately at a strategic level. Water availability both within CWaC and in the wider region has potential to be affected by projected growth and by an increased risk of drought as a result of climate change. Although the North West is not generally a water stressed region, poorly planned development could potentially lead to unsustainable pressure on water resources through intensifying demand without providing additional supply. Historically, Dee Valley Water's supply-demand balance showed a surplus throughout the planning horizon (2015 - 2040) United Utilities: had a supply-demand surplus in three of our four water resource zones – (2015 – 2040). This data will be monitored and updated upon final publication of the relevant regional Water Resource Management Plans (Severn Trent and United Utilities).

5.46 Drainage and Wastewater Management Plans (DWMPs)- The DWMP assesses the effects of future pressures on our wastewater systems over the short, medium and long term, and what can be done to address these issues. Future development has the potential to affect water quality and availability through increased consumption and pollution, wastewater discharges, water runoff and modification. The utility providers and are likely to maintain adequate water services over the plan period; however, it will be important for new development to avoid negative impacts on water quality, and instead contribute to reducing consumption and improving efficiency.

Health and education infrastructure

5.47 The NPPF (2024) states that planning policies and decisions should support development that makes efficient use of land, taking into account the availability and capacity of infrastructure and services, both existing and proposed, as well as their potential for further improvement. The new Local Plan will therefore be required to promote a sustainable pattern of development that seeks to meet the development needs of the borough and align growth and infrastructure.

5.48 Education - As the new Local Plan is progressed, the Council will need to assess the level of required education infrastructure across all phases; nursery, primary, secondary, special education needs and sixth form, taking into account the locality, number of developments proposed, timings of each development, number of dwellings and estimated pupil yield in line with the number of places available.

5.49 This information will be used to assess whether a local school(s) would be required to expand or whether the provision of a new school(s) would be necessary. As a very general rule, an additional 1,000 houses would generate the need for a primary school and 3,500 additional houses would generate the need for a new secondary school. This would however very much depend on where the development was located and what provision was already available in the area.

5.50 Health – A similar assessment would also need to be undertaken based on the capacity of existing GP practices and whether an increase in the number of households in a catchment would generate the need for an extension to an existing facility or whether a new build surgery in the locality would be required. Continued liaison with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) will be undertaken as the new Local Plan is developed.