

Cheshire West & Chester Council

Local Plan

(Part One) Strategic Policies



**Sustainability Appraisal
Adoption Statement**

January 2015

Visit: cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk



Cheshire West
and Chester

Contents

1	Introduction	2
2	The Local Plan	3
3	How Environmental and Sustainability considerations have been integrated into the Local Plan Part One	4
4	How the Sustainability and HRA Screening Reports have been taken into account	6
5	How responses to consultation on the draft Sustainability Report have been taken into account	9
6	The reasons for choosing the plan as adopted, in the light of the other reasonable alternatives considered	10
7	The measures that are to be taken to monitor the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the plan	11

1 Introduction

1 Introduction

1.1 Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan (Part One) Strategic Policies (the Plan) was adopted on 29 January 2015. It is the first borough wide local plan for the unitary council of Cheshire West and Chester, which was established on 1 April 2009. The Plan provides strategic policies for the area for the period 2010-2030. It replaces in part the policies and proposals in the adopted plans for the former districts of Chester City, Vale Royal and Ellesmere Port and Neston, the Cheshire Waste Local Plan and the Cheshire Minerals Local Plan. The remaining policies and proposals in those plans will be replaced in due course by the Local Plan (Part Two) Land Allocations and Detailed Policies, which is currently being prepared.

1.2 As required by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the Local Plan (Part One) was subject to Sustainability Appraisal (SA) throughout its preparation. The SA incorporated the requirements of the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive. Full details of the methodology and outcomes of the appraisal are set out in the Submission Sustainability Appraisal Report (December 2013) and Main Modifications Sustainability Appraisal (September 2014).

1.3 This Adoption Statement has been prepared in accordance with regulations⁽ⁱ⁾ and sets out how environmental considerations and the SA have influenced the preparation of the Plan. It shows how consultation responses to the SA were taken into account and why the policies and proposals were chosen in light of other alternative options assessed. It addresses how the significant sustainability effects of implementing the Plan will be monitored. It also discusses the conclusions of the Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening Report (December 2013) and how this has been taken account into the Plan.

1.4 This is the Sustainability Appraisal Adoption Statement that is to be read alongside the Sustainability Appraisal Report into the Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan (Part One) Strategic Policies. The Sustainability Appraisal Report comprises the Main Modifications Sustainability Appraisal (September 2014) and Submission Sustainability Appraisal Report (December 2013). These documents, together with other Local Plan documents, can be inspected free of charge in the Council's main offices during normal opening hours and libraries and online at www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/localplan.

i Regulation 36 of the Town & Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004; Regulation 16 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans & Programmes Regulations 2004

2 The Local Plan

2.1 Work on the Local Plan (Part One) began in 2009. Key stages which were subject to consultation were:

- Preparation of topic papers on key issues for the borough in June 2009;
- Core Strategy Issues and Options consultation in Winter 2009/10;
- Core Strategy Development Options consultation in June 2011;
- Preferred Policy Directions consultation in Autumn 2012;
- Publication draft consultation in Autumn 2013;
- Consultation on Inspector's Main Modifications in Autumn 2014.

2.2 The Plan was submitted to the Secretary of State in December 2013. It was subject to an Examination by an independent Planning Inspector with public hearings during June and July 2014. Following the hearings, the Inspector informed the Council that a number of Main Modifications would be required to make the Plan sound. Following 6 weeks' consultation on the Main Modifications, the Inspector issued his final report in December 2014. He concluded that the SA of the Plan is adequate, and agreed with the conclusion of the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Report that Appropriate Assessment is not necessary.

3 How Environmental and Sustainability considerations have been integrated into the Local Plan Part One

3 How Environmental and Sustainability considerations have been integrated into the Local Plan Part One

Sustainability Appraisal

3.1 Work on the SA of the emerging Local Plan began in 2009, in parallel with the Local Plan preparation. Work on SA was conducted in-house by members of the Planning Policy team. The aim of the SA was to improve the robustness of the Local Plan by identifying potential negative impacts and highlighting areas where environmental and wider sustainability issues could be addressed more fully in the Plan. The SA was carried out as a 'whole of plan assessment'. Rather than assessing each policy in isolation against the SA objectives, the effect of the policies were assessed as a whole. It was considered that this approach allowed for a comprehensive view of the impact of the plan on each of the topic areas identified below.

3.2 In accordance with the relevant regulations, in July 2009 the Council consulted on a Draft Screening Determination for the need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the Plan.

3.3 The screening concluded that the Plan is likely to have a significant environmental effect and a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) would therefore be required. This has been incorporated into the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) for the Plan.

3.4 At an early stage in the Plan's preparation, the Council prepared an SA Scoping Report. This brought together baseline information on a wide range of topics, highlighting key trends, issues and objectives for the area. It also included a list of the plans, programmes and strategies that might influence the preparation of the Plan. The Scoping Report deals with a wide range of sustainability topics under the following headings:

- Climate Change and Energy
- Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna
- Water
- Air
- Land and Resources
- Waste
- Cultural heritage and landscape
- Population and human health
- Housing
- Community safety
- Economic development

3.5 The Scoping Report identifies a series of 19 sustainability objectives and sub-objectives that can be monitored over time. These objectives form the sustainability framework which was used to appraise the policies and proposals of the emerging Plan.

3.6 The Council consulted on the initial draft Sustainability Scoping Report in July 2009. Consultees included the statutory bodies for SEA⁽ⁱⁱ⁾. Amendments were made and a final version was published in November 2009. In accordance with national guidance and following changes to national planning

ii Environment Agency, English Heritage, Natural England, Natural Resources Wales (formerly Countryside Council for Wales), Cadw

How Environmental and Sustainability considerations have been integrated into the Local Plan Part One 3

policy, the SA Scoping Report was subsequently reviewed and revised reports were published and consulted on at various stages of the plan preparation. The final version was published in January 2012.

3.7 In 2009 the Core Strategy Issues and Options were produced and were subject to sustainability appraisal. At that stage it was difficult to assess the sustainability of the spatial options as they were very broad based and did not have the level of detail required to enable a comprehensive assessment. It was recognised that to some extent this was to be expected at this stage especially as key pieces of evidence were not yet available.

3.8 In the period following the Issues and Options consultation, changes to the planning system including the proposals to revoke the Regional Spatial Strategy and the publication of the National Planning Policy Framework, had a strong influence on plan making. The Preferred Policy Directions document (PPD) was prepared within that new policy context.

3.9 The Local Plan PPD and other reasonable alternatives, including those from the development options stage, were subject to SA. An interim SA report was published in August 2012 and consulted on alongside the PPD.

3.10 The outcome of the PPD sustainability appraisal, together with consultation responses and updates to supporting evidence, informed the preparation of the Publication Draft Local Plan. Draft policies and potential key sites, together with reasonable alternatives, were subject to SA. This informed development of the final policies included in the Publication Draft Local Plan, which was subject to a further SA. This was an iterative process and the SA work and policy development were undertaken in parallel. The Publication SA report (July 2013) sets out the outcomes of this work.

3.11 Having considered the representations received on the Publication Draft plan, the Council carried forward the policies and strategic site allocations, without modification, to the Submission Local Plan. This was accompanied by the Submission Sustainability Appraisal Report (December 2013), which carried forward the findings of the SA of the Publication Draft Plan.

3.12 Following the Examination into the Plan in Summer 2014, the Inspector identified some Main Modifications which were required to make the Plan 'sound'. SA of the Main Modifications was undertaken and concluded that the modifications do not raise any additional significant sustainability effects.

Habitats Regulations Assessment

3.13 In accordance with legislative requirements⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾ HRA screening was undertaken at key points during plan preparation (Issues and Options, PPD and Publication Draft). The Screening was undertaken by independent consultants and was circulated to organisations including Natural England and Countryside Council for Wales. The HRA report concluded that the Cheshire West & Chester Local Plan could be screened out as not leading to a likely significant effect on European sites. The final HRA Screening report (December 2013) states that:

'it is considered that the Cheshire West & Chester Local Plan comprises a sufficient policy framework to enable the subsequent delivery of necessary measures to avoid or mitigate adverse effects on the integrity of European sites'.

4 How the Sustainability and HRA Screening Reports have been taken into account

4 How the Sustainability and HRA Screening Reports have been taken into account

4.1 The Preferred Policy Directions (PPD) was the first stage of the Local Plan that had been prepared within the new planning policy context and began to form the policy framework for subsequent stages of plan preparation. The appraisal of the PPD did not raise any significant sustainability effects, but it did recommend a number of mitigation and enhancement measures to be taken into account at later stages of plan preparation, which are listed below:

- The need to reinforce the role of Green Infrastructure in the borough, recognising its environmental, economic and social value;
- Need to recognise the biodiversity value of brownfield sites;
- Identifying the two Air Quality Management Areas and air quality issues elsewhere in the borough that will need to be taken into account in planning for new development;
- Recognising the role that biodiversity and greenspace can have in contributing towards air quality;
- Ensuring sufficient provision is made through the policies of the Local Plan for assessing the impacts of proposals and for avoiding, reducing or remedying any negative impacts;
- The need to explain clearly how new development sites in the borough will be allocated in line with the needs of the borough as identified in the evidence base;
- Setting a clear strategy for Green Belt release if it is deemed to be required at the next stage;
- Ensuring the spatial strategy and locations for new development policies link in and are not contradicted by other policies in the plan;
- Including explicit provision to protect the best and most versatile agricultural land from new development;
- The need to clearly set out the role that landfill void space will play in the management of waste in the borough in the future;
- Requiring all new development to consider, at an early stage in the development process, how the waste produced, during its construction and once developed and occupied, will be stored and managed before collection for disposal;
- Preparing guidelines to ensure any development on released land will preserve the setting of Chester historic assets and its sense of place;
- Directing potential Green Belt releases away from landscape corridors, approaches and areas that make a significant contribution to Chester's character;
- Ensuring that any GB releases will retain or provide well defined urban edges and the compact nature of the city, attributes which contribute to Chester's sense of identity;
- The scope to strengthen and enhance the strategy for health and well being;
- The scope to protect the labour market as a whole particularly in the early years of the plan when the country could still be in or recovering from recession;
- Fuel poverty is currently not specifically addressed through any of the preferred policy directions;
- The need to look at the visitor economy in terms of its links to green infrastructure, impacts on the rural area and protecting and enhancing cultural, heritage and landscape; and
- Concern that the design requirements for new development set out in the PPD are a maximum, with no indication of the minimum standards that would be required in development. There is no reference to site layout, scale and massing in the design policies.

How the Sustainability and HRA Screening Reports have been taken into account 4

- There is no minimum standard or explicitly reference in the PPD for some environmental issues that should be considered in the design new development such as water supply and quality, waste management, habitat protection and creation, climate change, energy and air quality.

4.2 After the PPD stage, a revised Local Development Scheme (July 2013) was published which set out the Council's intention to prepare the Local Plan in two parts; Part One to cover the strategic framework for the borough, and Part Two to contain detailed policies and site allocations. Some issues resulted in direct amendments to policies (as set out below), while other issues were dealt with by more general changes as the Local Plan developed. However, some of the issues set out above were reviewed during preparation of the Local Plan (Part One) and were considered to be more relevant to the detailed policies in the Local Plan (Part Two). The SA was only one consideration when updating the plan, with other emerging evidence and consultation responses also influencing policy preparation.

4.3 Policies in the Plan were subsequently drafted and were subject to SA. The table below sets out the key changes that were made to policies in the Publication Draft Plan as a result of sustainability appraisal recommendations^(iv):

Policy	Amendments to Publication Plan resulting from SA
STRAT3 - Chester	Reference to the need to mitigate impacts on air quality arising from development proposals, added to the explanatory text.
STRAT4 – Ellesmere Port	<p>Addition of text relating to the prevention of unacceptable impacts on environmentally sensitive areas including the Mersey Estuary;</p> <p>Identifying the presence of an Air Quality Management Area and the need to ensure that new development considers impacts on air quality;</p> <p>Text added relating to the need to opportunities for freight transport to be maximised on the rail network or Manchester Ship Canal.</p>
STRAT11 - infrastructure	Safety and security improvements added to the list of infrastructure.
ECON3 – Visitor Economy	<p>Wording amended to encourage access to visitor attractions by sustainable modes of transport and link to the transport policy;</p> <p>Seek improvements for green and blue corridors, recognising their potential to act as leisure destinations;</p> <p>Encourage the use of previously developed land for tourism use where opportunities exist.</p>
SOC5 – Health and well being	Text added to explanatory text to recognise the links between green infrastructure and biodiversity and health

iv See table in Appendix C of the Submission Sustainability Appraisal report for further detail

4 How the Sustainability and HRA Screening Reports have been taken into account

Policy	Amendments to Publication Plan resulting from SA
ENV3 – Green infrastructure	Text added to policy explanation to refer to the links between GI and flood mitigation, water quality, biodiversity, sustainable transport, LTP priorities and the cycling strategy.
ENV4 – Biodiversity and geodiversity	Text added to policy to refer to creating areas of wildlife as well as protecting, enhancing, expanding and linking areas.
ENV5 – Historic Environment	Policy strengthened in relation to avoiding loss of, or damage to historic assets
ENV7 – Alternative energy supplies	Policy strengthened to add that a Habitats Regulations Assessment will be required to assess the impacts for standalone renewable energy schemes likely to have an unacceptable impact on internationally protected species and habitats.

4.4 In addition to appraisal of policies, all key sites and reasonable alternatives considered through the preparation of the Local Plan have been subject to Sustainability Appraisal. The appraisal used a methodology which was based on that used for the appraisal of policies but tailored specifically for sites. It took account of constraints such as land quality, flood risk and environmental designations that would need to be addressed as part of any specific development proposal.

4.5 Sites considered fell into three categories: (i) sites which contribute to the Council's regeneration priorities; (ii) sites that are safeguarded for a specific use; and (iii) new sites to be allocated for development through the Plan. An assessment of reasonable alternatives was undertaken for any new site allocations being considered. This included the SA of candidate sites for Green Belt release around Chester, following the identification of the need for Green Belt release around Chester at PPD stage. Where alternatives sites were assessed, the outcome of the SA informed the decision on the final selection of sites to include in the Local Plan. More information on this is provided in section 6 of this report below.

4.6 Further detail on the key sites and reasonable alternatives can be found in the Local Plan Key Sites Background Paper (July 2013). A full list of sites appraised is also set out in Table 19.2 of the Submission SA Report, with commentary on the appraisal approach, alternatives and reasons for discounting.

Habitats Regulations Assessment

4.7 The PPD HRA screening report made recommendations on specific wording to be included in the Local Plan to ensure that the requirements of the Habitats Directive are met, particularly in relation to potential recreational and water quality impacts on the Mersey and Dee Estuaries. Wording was added to relevant policies to address these points, specifically STRAT4 – Ellesmere Port, ENV3 – Green Infrastructure, and ENV4 – Biodiversity and geodiversity.

How responses to consultation on the draft Sustainability Report have been taken into account 5

5 How responses to consultation on the draft Sustainability Report have been taken into account

5.1 Full details of comments received and the Council's consultation response the four main stages of SA preparation (Scoping Report, Issues & Options, Preferred Policy Directions and Publication Draft) are set out in the document 'Submission Sustainability Appraisal Consultation Report' (December 2013).

5.2 Many respondents provided helpful information, advice and guidance which was taken on board in the SA process, improving its robustness and supporting evidence base. In relation to the Scoping Report, amendments were made to baseline data, the list of plans and programmes, key issues and SA objectives in light of consultation comments. Consultation responses played an important role in shaping and finalising the SA objectives and resultant SA framework, which formed the basis for the appraisal as a whole.

5.3 At Issues and Options stage, Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) (now Natural Resources Wales) expressed concerns about potential adverse impacts on air quality affecting Y Berwyn SAC and SPA and Halkyn Mountain SAC. This issue was addressed in the HRA, which concluded that proposed policy options would not have a significant effect on either site. CCW also highlighted potential impacts that development might have on abstraction and resultant water quality in the River Dee and Dee Estuary. This issue was addressed in the Council's Water Cycle Study, which informed consideration of infrastructure requirements needed to support development options. Similar issues were reiterated by CCW at PPD stage. The Council considers that these issues have been adequately addressed through the SA and HRA processes.

5.4 At Publication Draft stage, comments related to the appraisal of alternatives for release of Green Belt land. The council considered that this issue has been properly addressed as set out in the SA report.

5.5 Comments also related to the approach to policy STRAT 8 – Rural Area, and the appraisal of reasonable alternatives. This issue is considered to be fully addressed in the PPD interim SA and the Publication Draft SA.

5.6 Comments related specifically to the effect of including a higher housing requirement in the Plan. The development of policy options, including housing figures, was set out at each stage of the plan making process. The reasonable alternatives are set out in the PPD Interim SA and the Publication Draft SA. The Submission SA report sets out how the policies in the plan evolved and the testing of reasonable alternatives (chapter 19 and Appendix D).

6 The reasons for choosing the plan as adopted, in the light of the other reasonable alternatives considered

6 The reasons for choosing the plan as adopted, in the light of the other reasonable alternatives considered

6.1 Reasonable alternative policy options were tested at Issues & Options and Preferred Policy Directions stage. Details of the alternatives assessed and the SA outcomes are set out in the relevant Interim SA reports. Table 19 (page 100) of the Submission SA report sets out policy options considered for each policy area. It identifies which option was chosen at PPD stage and the reason for discounting other options.

6.2 In addition, Appendix D of the Submission SA Report shows the development of policies from Issues & Options stage through to PPD and Publication drafts. The alternatives assessed and the SA outcomes are identified in the diagram, for each stage of plan development.

6.3 Alternative sites were tested at Publication Draft stage. Alternative sites were identified and appraised for the proposed new sites in Chester and Winsford. For Chester, further work was undertaken to identify candidate sites for Green Belt release around Chester following the PPD stage. Three candidate sites were identified in the Green Belt Study and these were all subject to Sustainability Appraisal (SA Report Appendix B) at the Publication Draft stage. Only one site at Wrexham Road was taken forward into the Publication Draft Local Plan. The SA of these sites was a high level appraisal considering the findings of the Green Belt Study. The appraisal identified potential negative impacts for all three sites against a number of SA objectives. There was no clear preferred option arising from the SA. Mitigation measures would be required to minimise impacts, whichever option was chosen. The decision to allocate land south of Wrexham Road was in line with the recommendations of the Green Belt Study, taking account of the purposes of including land within the green belt and the exceptional circumstances requiring new housing in Chester.

6.4 For Winsford, three sites were identified as reasonable alternatives to help meet housing needs. The SA identified the Station Quarter urban extension as being the more sustainable location. The alternative sites would be less able to deliver associated community benefits and more difficult to integrate into the existing town than the Station Quarter site. This fed into the decision to allocate Winsford Station Quarter Urban Extension, a site also identified in the Winsford Neighbourhood Plan.

6.5 It should be noted that the SA was only one consideration when making decisions about policy options. Planning judgements, supporting evidence, emerging data, consultation responses and the impact of other policies and programmes also influenced decision making. As can be seen from the diagram in Appendix D of the Submission SA report, the trail of policy development is not always straightforward, reflecting the complexity of plan making and the many different factors which influence it.

The measures that are to be taken to monitor the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the plan 7

7 The measures that are to be taken to monitor the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the plan

7.1 An important part of the SA framework is the proposed monitoring framework. As the SA process is an iterative process, its success and effectiveness will be monitored by the collection of baseline data according to the identified indicators. A cost effective and reasonable monitoring scheme has been developed during the plan making process. The monitoring framework will include addressing any data gaps in the baseline information and developing appropriate longer term indicators to monitor the significant effects of the Local Plan policies. The final SA report sets out the monitoring indicators for the SA in each of the topic chapters. Monitoring of the SA will be incorporated in the overall monitoring arrangements for the Local Plan.

Accessing Cheshire West and Chester Council information and services

Council information is also available in Audio, Braille, Large Print or other formats. If you would like a copy in a different format, in another language or require a BSL interpreter, please email us at **equalities@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk**

إذا أردت المعلومات بلغة أخرى أو بطريقة أخرى، نرجو أن تطلب ذلك منا.

যদি আপনি এই ডকুমেন্ট অন্য ভাষায় বা ফরমেটে চান, তাহলে দয়া করে আমাদেরকে বলুন।

Pokud byste požadovali informace v jiném jazyce nebo formátu, kontaktujte nás

Jeżeli chcieliby Państwo uzyskać informacje w innym języku lub w innym formacie, prosimy dać nam znać.

ਜੇ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਜਾਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪ ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੀਦੀ, ਤਾਂ ਇਹ ਸਾਥੋਂ ਮੰਗ ਲਵੋ।

如欲索取以另一語文印製或另一格式製作的資料，請與我們聯絡。

Türkçe bilgi almak istiyorsanız, bize başvurabilirsiniz.

اگر آپ کو معلومات کسی دیگر زبان یا دیگر شکل میں درکار ہوں تو برائے مہربانی ہم سے پوچھئے۔

Tel: 0300 123 8 123 **Textphone:** 18001 01606 867 670

email: equalities@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

web: www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk