

# EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT and RURAL PROOFING



## WINSFORD NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

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## **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RURAL PROOFING**

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# **PART 1: EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Equality Act 2010 places a duty on all public authorities in the exercise of their functions to have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, to advance equality of opportunity, and to foster good relations between persons who have a “protected characteristic” and those who do not.

**“Protected characteristics” are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.**

This report assesses the consultation draft of the Winsford Neighbourhood Plan to ensure that Winsford Town Council is satisfying its statutory duties in this regard.

Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) is a systematic analysis of a policy or policies, in order to explore the potential for an adverse impact on a particular group or community. It is a method of assessing and recording the likely differential and/or adverse impact of a policy on people from different groups. If a policy results in unfairness or discrimination then changes to eliminate or lessen the impact should be considered.

## **Aims of the Equality Analysis**

The purpose of the analysis is to increase participation and inclusion, to change the culture of public decision-making and to place a more proactive approach to the promotion of equality and fairness at the heart of public policy. The processes involved in conducting the analysis should not be looked on as an end in themselves. Instead, it should be borne in mind that the aim is the promotion of fairness and equality of opportunity and thus it is the outcomes that are of primary concern.

In undertaking the EqIA we should be clear about why the Neighbourhood Plan is needed, what the intended outcomes are, and how it will be ensured that the policy will work as intended.

## **Methodology**

An assessment has been made on whether the Neighbourhood Plan has a positive, negative or neutral impact on each of the protected characteristics (in so far as data is available). A brief justification of the policies and proposals in the Neighbourhood Plan, and notes of any mitigation, has been provided. Where the impact is negative, this would be given a high, medium or low assessment. It is important to rate the impact of the policy based on the current situation (i.e. disregarding any actions planned to be carried out in future).

High impact – a significant potential impact, risk of exposure, history of complaints, no mitigating measures in place etc.

Medium impact – some potential impact exists, some mitigating measures are in place, poor evidence

Low impact – almost no relevancy to the process, e.g. an area that is very much legislation led

## **BASELINE DATA**

Data for Winsford is available for the following protected characteristics: age, disability, race, religious belief, and sex. Data is not available for the following protected characteristics: gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, and sexual orientation.

Unless stated the data source is the Rural Community Profile for Winsford (Parish) by Action With Communities in Rural Areas (ACRE) Rural Evidence Project January 2012.

In 2010 there were 31,040 people living in Winsford. 49.1% of these were male, and 50.9% were female – comparable figures for the UK were 49.3% male and 50.7% female.

Winsford has a higher proportion of people aged 0-15 yrs (20.8%) than the national average (18.7%), and a lower proportion of people older than 65 years (14.6%) than the national average (16.5%). The proportion of people of working age is similar to the national average – 64.5% in Winsford compared to 64.8% nationally.

Winsford has a greater proportion of people with a limiting long-term illness (14.2%) compared to the national average (11.4%). It also has a higher proportion of Disability Living Allowance claimants (7.7%) than the national average (5.0%).

The profile of ethnic origin for Winsford in 2001 was British white – 97.1% (UK – 87%), Other white – 1.4% (UK – 3.9%), Non-white – 1.6% (UK – 9.1%). These figures indicate that Winsford has very low Non-white population (465 persons in 2001) compared to the national average.

Religious belief in Winsford is weighted towards Christianity with 81.1% of the population stating that they are Christian. The other principal religions are very small proportions of the population: 0.24% are Muslims, 0.21% are Hindus, 0.15% are Buddhist, 0.09% are Sikhs, and 0.02% are Jewish. These five religions comprise only 0.71% of the population in total. 11.7% of the population declared no religion and 6.4% did not state their religion. (Data from 2011 Census on the Policy Research Centre website.)

Although direct data is not readily available for local pregnancy and maternity rates, the data shows that Winsford has a relatively high proportion of persons in married households or co-habiting (53.1%) compared to the national average (44.8%). This of course excludes single parent households. The teenage conception rate, at 50.5 per 1,000 for the Winsford and Rural East Partnership Board - an average of 61 teenagers becoming pregnant each year – is considerably higher (worse) than the rate (35.8 per 1,000) for the Central and Eastern Cheshire Primary Care Trust area as a whole. East Winsford MSOA has the highest percentage (8.1%) of children aged under 5 and child dependency ratio (33.8%) for an MSOA area within CECPT (CECPCT Annual Public Health Report 2009-10). These figures suggest that the pregnancy and maternity rates in the Winsford area are higher than average.

Gender reassignment and sexual orientation are generally invisible characteristics for which little reliable data exists at local level.

In summary Winsford has a higher proportion of young persons and relatively fewer older people than the national average, a very low proportion of non-white persons and persons practising religions other than Christianity, and a higher proportion of disabled persons than the national average.

## **AIMS AND OUTCOMES OF THE WINSFORD NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN**

The Winsford Neighbourhood Plan is needed to provide a framework of policies and proposals for the development of the town over the next 15 years. The emerging Core Strategy of Cheshire West and Chester Council has indicated that some 3,150 additional homes are likely to be built and 20 hectares of employment land developed over the plan period. The Neighbourhood Plan is required to ensure that new development is located and designed to provide the optimum benefit for the local community as a whole and to improve the way the town functions and is perceived.

The Winsford Neighbourhood Plan contains a Vision for the town as a lively prosperous place, with good leisure and community facilities, a vibrant town centre, a wide choice of new high quality housing, a variety of employment opportunities, a growing population, improved public transport links, and good schooling available to children of all ages.

The outcomes of the Neighbourhood Plan are reflected in the Key Themes of the Neighbourhood Plan which are intended to create

- A more attractive town with an improved image,
- Better and more diverse use of the Flashes and the River Weaver,
- A more attractive and vibrant town centre,
- A strong local employment base with a wide variety of businesses,
- A town that is growing sustainably,
- Improved social, community and leisure facilities for all, and
- Improved movement around the town.

The Neighbourhood Plan contains a spatial strategy for the growth of Winsford expressed in a plan entitled The View of Winsford's Future. This shows where the main areas of new development will be located, quantifies its scale and illustrates where public open space and better linkages will be provided. It also identifies the main sites of brownfield land which will be developed over the plan period.

The Neighbourhood Plan has a delivery strategy which will be reviewed annually (?) to monitor how well the Vision is being realised and the key themes are being delivered.

## **IMPACT ON GROUPS WITH PROTECTED CHARACTERISTICS**

The Winsford Neighbourhood Plan aims to create benefits for everyone who lives, works, shops, or spends leisure time in Winsford. This will be achieved by developing new and better housing, including affordable housing, providing additional employment development, promoting additional social, community and leisure facilities, improving access to open space, and taking opportunities to enhance the quality of the environment.

Different groups will be affected in different ways by the Neighbourhood Plan and the purpose of this analysis is to identify specifically how various groups will be affected and assess whether there will be any adverse impact as a result of any policies or proposals in the Neighbourhood Plan.

### **Age**

Specific consultation activities were carried out to involve both young people and older people in the production of the Winsford Neighbourhood Plan (see Consultation Report).

A need was identified early in the process for improved recreational facilities for young people, as well as the provision of affordable housing and employment opportunities for this group as they enter adulthood. This is particularly important given that Winsford has a higher than average proportion of young people in its population.

The Vision for Winsford seeks to provide a town where children of all ages and abilities will have access to good quality schooling.

Theme 6 of the Neighbourhood Plan seeks to improve social, community and leisure facilities by providing activities for youth and play areas for children.

The Neighbourhood Plan contains specific policies that will promote the development of employment opportunities for young people (Objective 5.6A) and will require new housing developments in the town to contribute to the provision of social and community facilities and the creation of activities for young people through financial contributions (Objective 5.6B). The Neighbourhood Plan recognises the need for affordable housing, particularly for young people, and this will be provided in accordance with Cheshire West and Chester Council's Local Plan policy. Objective 5.5A seeks to provide a wide variety of new housing, and aims to negotiate the level of affordable housing on a site by site basis.

Older people will benefit from the provision of more social and community facilities (Objective 5.6B), and their re-provision in the town centre if affected by redevelopment (Objective 5.3A). The Vision for Winsford specifically advocates the improvement of public transport to provide better access to shopping and leisure facilities, and site allocations have been made to provide new development which has the greatest potential for good public transport links to the town centre. Older people will also benefit from the improvement of public transport as a key component of improving movement around the town and the region (Objective 5.7A)

The consultation revealed that many people think that access to and the quality of open spaces is important as a way of providing recreational activities for young people and encouraging greater use of existing open space, particularly around the Flashes and the River Weaver. Themes 2 and 6 incorporate this as key aims of the Neighbourhood Plan.

The Neighbourhood Plan proposes that various existing areas of open space – the Town Park, Verdin Field, etc. – should be improved to provide high quality open space, which will encourage greater use by the whole population but especially by the young (Objective 5.1B). The development of new sites will be required to provide improved public open space particularly around the Bottom Flash (as described in the View of Winsford's Future and in Objectives 5.2B and 5.6B). The various site allocations also include the provision of

new public open space or the improvement of existing open space (Section 6 Development Sites).

### **Disability**

The need for improved access to recreational facilities and public open space were identified in the early stages of consultation as important for many people, and provisions to improve these will benefit the disabled in particular.

Theme 7 aims to improve movement around the town and region in relation to vehicular, pedestrian and cycle movement as well as public transport. This criterion was used to test the preferred option for the Neighbourhood Plan, so that the draft Neighbourhood Plan makes good provision for this aim to be realised over the plan period.

The Neighbourhood Plan contains specific proposals to improve movement within the town. Objective 5.3C seeks to improve the Old High Street by providing a good pedestrian environment which will encourage movement between the town centre and the River Weaver Valley.

Objective 5.5B aims to create new streets and spaces which are designed as places first and not just as corridors for vehicular movement, in accordance with *Manual For Streets* principles.

Objective 5.7B seeks to improve the pedestrian environment and the ability to move around by reducing the barrier of the A54, improving the pedestrian environment by public realm works, and by improving pedestrian crossing points. It also seeks to improve access to the countryside and the Weaver Valley, including new footpath accesses to the Flashes.

A Quick Win under the Transport and Movement heading is to improve existing foot paths and if possible upgrade to multi-user paths to encourage more users including cyclists and the disabled.

### **Maternity and pregnancy**

Key issues for women who are pregnant or who have young children are access to appropriate housing, flexible employment, and access to facilities including health, developmental, play and public realm facilities.

The Neighbourhood Plan seeks to improve the public realm generally, to provide a good pedestrian environment, and to provide better access to it for all groups. Objectives 5.5B and 5.7B seek to provide public spaces which are designed as places for people first, not corridors for vehicles, and to improve pedestrian access to amenities such as the Flashes and River Weaver.

Theme 6 of the Neighbourhood Plan aims to improve social, community and leisure facilities, particularly by providing play areas for young children and improving the quality of play facilities in the partial development of the Verdin Fields (site NTC 2).

Objective 5.6B seeks to provide more leisure facilities for all sections of the population including by developing a playing fields strategy for Winsford.

Proposals for individual sites incorporate a requirement for play facilities (site STC 2, Policy S: Station Quarter, site S1,

### **Race**

Non-white ethnic groups make up a very small proportion of the population in Winsford – in 2001 only 1.6% of the population was Non-white and within this there are several groups with different ethnic origins.

Non-white ethnic groups have difficulties around discrimination (sometimes leading to hate crime), language, health and well-being, deprivation and culture.

The Neighbourhood Plan seeks to ensure that new development follows good urban design principles and provides safe public environments which are well-lit, free from hidden corners and are overlooked by occupied properties providing passive surveillance of the public realm.

Objective 5.4B in the Neighbourhood Plan seeks to provide safe and convenient pedestrian and cycle routes to edge-of-town employment sites.

Objective 5.5B seeks to provide new high quality buildings with fronts which overlook streets and spaces, avoiding "dead" edges to public areas, and provide safe and direct pedestrian and cycle links to the wider town.

In 2012 approval was given for two additional gypsy and traveller sites in Winsford, adding a total of 38 new permanent pitches for this community. An assessment of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation in 2007 revealed the need to provide between 31 and 45 residential pitches and 10 transit pitches across Cheshire West and Chester (see *Focus on our Communities – Cheshire West and Chester's Black and Minority Ethnic Community*). Winsford is therefore providing a very significant share of the accommodation needed for this group when considered on a district-wide basis.

The Neighbourhood Plan recognises a continuing need for affordable housing in Winsford. Objective 5.5.A in the Neighbourhood Plan says that each development will be expected to provide a mix of different dwelling types and a range of tenures. The provision of affordable housing will accord with the policies in Cheshire West and Chester Council's Local Plan. This will potentially help ethnic groups who are living in deprivation or who need larger homes.

### **Sex**

The Neighbourhood Plan contains no specific policies or proposals for any particular gender. The Neighbourhood Plan has been written to provide equal opportunity to both sexes in respect of the provision of development and access to facilities.

Neither sex is disadvantaged by any of the policies and proposals in the Neighbourhood Plan; on the contrary both sexes will benefit equally from the implementation of the Neighbourhood Plan.

### **Religion, Gender re-assignment, Sexual orientation**

Key issues for religious groups are discrimination relating to employment, housing and the provision of services, and their portrayal in the media.

Key issues for gender re-assigned people, gays and lesbians are personal relationships, transphobia and/or discrimination, and hate crime.

The Neighbourhood Plan does not and cannot directly address the social attitudes that are involved in these problems. However, it does seek to provide a built environment which is open to all, with a safe public realm which all social groups can access and use equally.

Cheshire West and Chester Council has district-wide policies relating to the provision of services which are geared to provide fair access to all and which take into account the special needs of these different groups.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Winsford Neighbourhood Plan provides a strategy for the development of the town, and a range of policies and proposals, which will result in positive benefits for many parts of the local community with protected characteristics: older people, young people and young children, disabled people and those with limited mobility, and maternity and pregnancy.

Whilst not explicitly addressing the needs of racial or religious groups, or transgender, gay or lesbian groups, or women, the Neighbourhood Plan does make equal provision for affordable housing and a wide range of housing, and seeks to provide additional social, community and leisure facilities which will benefit these groups equally. It also seeks to provide a safer environment, particularly a safer public realm, where people with protected characteristics will be less liable to be subject to hate crime.

## **PART 2: RURAL PROOFING**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Rural proofing is a process for evaluating policies to ensure that they take account of rural needs. This evaluation tests what impact the Winsford Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have on the rural area it affects, and whether any adjustments or changes to the Neighbourhood Plan are needed to ensure that the rural community involved is not disadvantaged by the Neighbourhood Plan in any way.

This assessment uses the criteria in the Rural Proofing Guidance (2009) produced by the Commission for Rural Communities.

### **IMPACT ON RURAL COMMUNITIES**

Winsford is a town with an estimated population of 31,040 in 2010, located in the rural heart of Cheshire. It provides shopping, employment, community and leisure facilities for its own population and for the rural area around it. Cheshire West and Chester's Core Strategy Development Options Survey found that Winsford suffers from an underperforming town centre, below average education achievement in some schools, and pockets of significant deprivation. Despite this, Winsford is a relatively affordable town in the context of the wider Cheshire property market with a good range of services for daily life.

The Winsford Neighbourhood Plan aims to set out a framework of policies and proposals for new development over a 15 year period, which will enable the issues facing the town to be addressed, and provide the optimum benefit for the local community as a whole by improving the way the town functions and is perceived.

#### **Service provision and availability**

The Rural Proofing Guidance asks whether the Neighbourhood Plan will affect the availability of public and private services.

Winsford is the main town in the area and provides services for people in the town and from the surrounding settlements. Theme 6 of the Neighbourhood Plan aims to improve services and facilities in the town wherever possible.

Where new development is proposed the Neighbourhood Plan says that a corresponding improvement in services will be required, for example by providing a new bus service between the town centre and the railway station as part of the development of the proposed Station Quarter.

Objective 5.7A seeks to improve bus services within the town and also services that connect Winsford with the surrounding area. Where redevelopment is proposed, such as along the A54 frontage, services affected will be replaced (Policy TC: the Town Centre).

With regard to existing facilities such as schools, the growing population will support these and maintain their viability. Objective 5.6A seeks to ensure that schools are supported and continue to improve and that Winsford is provided with high quality education facilities for all ages, including opportunities for apprenticeships.

Objective 5.6B seeks to provide more leisure facilities for all sections of the population. Opportunities will be taken to ensure that new development proposals contribute to the provision of new or improved facilities and services for the new and the existing community, as private sector contributions under the relevant planning agreements.

## **Accessibility and infrastructure**

Winsford has good road connections with nearby towns and the national transport network. Car use is high in Winsford, and public transport is seen as expensive.

The Vision and Theme 7 in the Neighbourhood Plan seek to improve public transport within Winsford and to surrounding towns to create better links, providing local residents with access to job opportunities and shopping and leisure facilities in other places.

The spatial strategy for Winsford prioritises sites which have the best potential to achieve good public transport linkages with the town centre and the wider town. For example, a major new development is proposed near to the railway station where there are good opportunities for sustainable transport links.

Objectives 5.4A and 5.4B promote locations for employment growth which are accessible by public transport. Objective 5.7A seeks to improve public transport.

Objective 5.7C aims to improve road links to adjacent towns, in particular from the business areas and investigate ways of reducing through traffic in Winsford. This will benefit people living in settlements outside Winsford, who will be able to access the town and its facilities more easily.

## **Economies**

The Neighbourhood Plan proposes the development of around 20 hectares of employment land over the plan period. This will be focused in extensions of the two main industrial estates on the east and west edges of the town. However, there are various smaller sites in the centre of the town and along the River Weaver where mixed use development is proposed – this will include various types of business development involving small and medium sized enterprises (see the View of Winsford's Future).

These developments will provide employment and business start-up opportunities for people in the town and also people in the surrounding rural area. Theme 4 of the Neighbourhood Plan seeks to support and strengthen the local employment base and attract a variety of businesses to Winsford. Diversification of the economy will strengthen local supply chains, generate demand for sub-contractors including self-employed local people, and create a wider choice of job opportunities.

The Neighbourhood Plan proposes a limited expansion of the town, which will involve the development of 147 has of agricultural land immediately adjacent to the town. This will affect the farming businesses involved, and will result in the loss of productive agricultural land and may affect a small number of local jobs. However, this will be outweighed by the benefits to the local economy arising from the development of 40.8 has of employment land as part of this expansion. The development of 106.2 has of agricultural land for residential purposes will increase the population of the town and increase demand for local businesses thus improving their viability.

The Vision for the Neighbourhood Plan and Theme 2 aim to boost the local tourist economy by encouraging people to visit attractions developed around the salt mines, the Flashes and the River Weaver. This will involve the sensitive development of leisure facilities whilst preserving the special character of the Flashes and River Weaver in particular.

Objective 5.3D proposes a monthly farmers' market which would provide an outlet for local food producers in the town centre, and thus promote sustainable economic growth.

## **Disadvantage**

The Neighbourhood Plan identifies a continuing need for affordable or low cost housing, including shared ownership, in Winsford. There is also a need for affordable first-time buyer accommodation in particular.

Objective 5.5.A in the Neighbourhood Plan says that each development will be expected to provide a mix of different dwelling types and a range of tenures. The provision of affordable housing will accord with the policies in Cheshire West and Chester Council's Local Plan. However, a flexible approach will be taken and the proportion of affordable housing provided in new developments will be negotiated on a site by site basis.

### **Other rural proofing assessment criteria**

The Neighbourhood Plan says little about delivery costs or communications, as these are outside the scope of the Plan.

However, the Neighbourhood Plan is supported by a Delivery Strategy which will be regularly reviewed during the implementation of the Plan. The Delivery Strategy makes provision to develop sites in such a way as to enable the less commercially viable proposals in the Plan to be cross-subsidised by the more commercially viable proposals. This could take the form of ensuring that financial contributions secured through planning gain are used to provide local community facilities, or through the "pairing" of development sites such that the surplus generated by a commercially viable site is used to facilitate the development of a site which might be unviable if considered in isolation.

### **CONCLUSION**

The Winsford Neighbourhood Plan will improve accessibility within the town and between the town and surrounding areas. New development will help secure improved access to the amenities such as the Flashes and the River Weaver.

New residential development will also help finance the provision of additional community facilities which may not be affordable by the public sector alone. This will help make Winsford a much more sustainable community, and will similarly benefit its rural hinterland.

The Winsford Neighbourhood Plan will result in the loss of around 147 hectares of agricultural land on the edges of the town over the 15 year plan period. This will change the character of the areas affected from rural to urban or suburban, and may result in the loss of a small number of agricultural jobs.

However, the development of 41 hectares of employment land will significantly outweigh the loss of jobs, and the increase in the local population resulting from 106 hectares of residential development will help sustain local businesses. Where relevant new development will also be designed to facilitate access to the waterside for new residents and existing local community.