



Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Opinion for the Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan

July 2026

Introduction

In accordance with the requirements of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (as amended), this document is the screening determination on the need for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the Cheshire West and Chester (CW&C) Local Plan.

Under the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, the responsible authority (i.e. the local planning authority) must carry out an environmental assessment for any plan or programme that is prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use, which sets the framework for future development consent of certain projects. It is likely that Development Plan Documents (DPDs), such as the Local Plan will require SEA as they will contain planning policies that influence the above list of topics, and which will be used to determine planning applications.

The first stage in the SEA process is for the Council to determine whether or not a plan is likely to have a significant effect on the environment. This process should use a specified set of criteria (set out in Schedule 1 of the regulations). The results of this process must be summarised in an SEA screening opinion, which is then sent to the statutory bodies for comment. Once comments have been taken into account a screening determination is prepared setting out whether SEA is required and reasons for the decision and this must be made publicly available.

CW&C are currently getting ready to prepare a new Local Plan. The 'getting ready' stage includes preparing a timetable, establishing project management, consulting and engaging on the plan, developing the anticipated content of the plan and starting work on the SEA. Notice of intention to commence the Local Plan was published on 12 June 2026 and a timetable has also been published.

Environmental Outcomes Reports (EORs) will eventually replace SEA and Sustainability Appraisal for Local Plans, however the EOR regulations have not yet been implemented for plan-making.

The new Local Plan will cover the whole of the borough. It will set a spatial strategy for development, identifying where new development should be located in order to meet housing and employment needs. It will identify sites to meet the housing targets set by government. The new Local Plan will set out a series of topic-based policies and will allocate sites for development. The new Local Plan will also incorporate the Minerals and Waste Plan for CW&C.

Preparation of the Local Plan will involve stakeholders and the community in line with the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

The Council considers that the preparation of the Local Plan falls within the scope of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 on the basis that:

- The Local Plan is a plan which is subject to preparation and adoption by an authority at a local level and is required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions, as defined in Regulation 2;
- The Local Plan is prepared for town and country planning or land use and will set the framework for the future development consent of projects listed in Annex I or II of European Council Directive 2011/92/EU (Regulation 5); and
- The Local Plan will apply to a wider area than a small area at local level and is not a minor modification to an existing plan or programme.

A determination under Regulation 9 is, therefore, required as to whether the Local Plan is likely to have significant environmental effects.

Characteristics of the Local Plan

The screening process set out in Regulation 9 and Schedule 1 of the regulations includes two sets of characteristics for determining the likely significance of the effects on the environment. These relate firstly to the characteristics of the Local Plan and secondly to the characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected. There are a number of criteria relating to each of these characteristics, the answers to which are set out below.

Table 1 - Assessment of the significant environmental effects of the Local Plan Update

Criteria (Schedule 1)	Significant environmental effect likely (yes/no)?	Assessment and justification
1 The characteristics of the plans and programmes, having regard in particular to:		
(a) The degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources.	Yes	The Local Plan will set a new policy framework. This will set the strategic context for planning projects and activities in CW&C in terms of the location of new development and the nature, size and operating conditions of such developments.
(b) The degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy.	Yes	The Local Plan sets the overarching vision for the other documents that make up the Council's development plan. It will set out a spatial strategy and housing figures for specific locations. It will also identify allocations for development and will set strategic policies. Neighbourhood Plans will need to take account of the housing figures set for their area.
(c) The relevance of the plan or programme for the	Yes	Section 39 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act requires that the Local Plan must

Criteria (Schedule 1)	Significant environmental effect likely (yes/no)?	Assessment and justification
integration of environmental considerations, in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development.		contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.
(d) Environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme.	Yes	The Local Plan will seek to address environmental problems that are relevant to planning.
(e) The relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of assimilated law on the environment (for example, plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection).	Yes	The Local Plan will impact on the implementation of assimilated law on the environment, for example in relation to protected species and habitats, waste management and water protection.
2 Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular to:		
(a) The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of effects.	Yes	The Local Plan will set a long-term vision, objectives and strategy for the spatial framework for new development within CW&C. Individual policies will have a different probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of effects, but generally the policies as a whole will have medium to high probability and medium to long-term duration effects. The effects are likely to be frequent within CW&C and some effects will be reversible, but others will be more difficult or potentially impossible to reverse.
(b) The cumulative nature of the effects.	Yes	There are likely to be cumulative affects arising from and between the different policies within the Local Plan. There could also be cumulative effects with other development plan documents and Neighbourhood Plans.
(c) The transboundary nature of the effects.	No	There are no transboundary effects arising from the Local Plan.
(d) The risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents).	No	There are unlikely to be risks to human health or the environment arising from the Local Plan.

Criteria (Schedule 1)	Significant environmental effect likely (yes/no)?	Assessment and justification
(e) The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected).	Yes	The Local Plan will apply to new development in the CW&C geographical area. This has an area of nearly 1,000 square kilometres and a population of 371,652 people (according to the mid 2024 population estimates based on the 2021 Census).
(f) The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to; (i) special natural characteristics or cultural heritage (ii) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values or (iii) intensive land use	Yes	The Local Plan covers the whole of CW&C, which is valued in terms of its built, natural and archaeological heritage. There may be the potential for the value and vulnerability of the area to be affected as a result of the Local Plan.
(g) The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.	Yes	The Local Plan will apply to all landscape types in CW&C, including those which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.

Conclusion

In accordance with Part 9 (2) of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, the Council, as the responsible authority, consider that the Local Plan is likely to have significant environmental effects and accordingly will require a SEA.

Section 39 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that any person or body who exercises any function in relation to a Local Plan or Minerals and Waste Plan must do so with the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development. The Sustainability Appraisal process is used to assess environmental, social and economic effects of policies and allocations. As such, the requirements of the SEA will be incorporated into the Sustainability Appraisal of the Local Plan.

Date of initial determination: 6 July 2026

Delegated decision made by Rob Charnley, Head of Planning and Place Making