

Land to the rear of Buxton Old Road (CFS112 / CFS113) also referred to as DS20

Objection to the Inclusion of Land Behind Buxton Old Road (CFS112 / CFS113) in the Cheshire East Local Plan

I wish to register a strong objection to the inclusion of land behind Buxton Old Road within the emerging Cheshire East Local Plan. In my view, this site is unsuitable for allocation and should be removed from further consideration within the Cheshire East Local Plan. The principal reason for this objection is the substantial, permanent and irreversible harm that development of this land would cause to the setting of Lyme Park and, in particular, to the iconic views both to and from The Cage. The Local Plan is intended to establish the vision for future development in Cheshire East through to the 2040's and will ultimately guide future site allocations and planning decisions. It is therefore essential that nationally important heritage and landscape assets are afforded the highest level of protection from the outset.

Lyme Park Is More Than a Listed Building

Lyme Park is not simply a country house surrounded by attractive countryside. It is one of the country's most important historic estates, comprising a Grade I listed house together with a Grade I Registered Park and Garden of Special Historic Interest. The Grade I Registered Park and Garden designation recognises the importance of the historic landscape as a heritage asset in its own right. The significance of Lyme Park extends far beyond its buildings and includes the designed landscape, its wider setting, its relationship with the surrounding countryside, and the extensive panoramic views that can be experienced from within the park.

The experience of the landscape is fundamental to understanding and appreciating Lyme Park. The surrounding countryside is not merely a backdrop. It forms part of the significance of the estate itself and contributes directly to its special character and enduring appeal. One of the most important locations from which this relationship can be appreciated is The Cage. The views both to and from The Cage are among the most iconic and widely recognised in both Cheshire and Derbyshire. Visitors do not come simply to look at a historic building. They come to experience a historic landscape and its relationship with the wider countryside.

The Proposed Site Occupies a Highly Sensitive Position Within Those Views

A crucial distinction must be made between development that is visible somewhere within the wider panorama and development that occupies a prominent position within an important view. It is acknowledged that modern development can already be seen in the far distance from Lyme Park. However, that development generally sits within the wider landscape and remains subordinate to the overall rural character of the view. It does not dominate the outlook nor materially diminish the experience of standing at The Cage and looking out across open countryside. The land behind Buxton Old Road is fundamentally different. This site occupies a substantially more prominent and visually influential position within the landscape. Development here would not simply add further housing to a distant horizon. It would introduce a significant area of urban development into land that currently forms part of the open countryside experienced from The Cage and other elevated viewpoints within Lyme Park. The result would be a fundamental and irreversible change to the character of the view. The issue is not whether development would be visible. The issue is that development would permanently transform part of a rural landscape into an urban one.

Permanent and Irreversible Harm

Development of this site would inevitably introduce:

- Residential buildings.
- Roads and associated highway infrastructure.
- Street lighting.
- Vehicle movements.

- Domestic activity.
- Gardens, fences and associated suburban features.
- The cumulative visual effects associated with a modern housing estate.

These changes would permanently alter the character of the landscape and urbanise an area that currently contributes to the rural setting of Lyme Park. Importantly, this harm cannot realistically be mitigated. Landscaping may soften some views over time, but it cannot recreate open countryside. Nor can it restore the historic relationship between Lyme Park and the surrounding landscape once development has taken place. The Council should therefore recognise that any harm resulting from the allocation of this site would be permanent and irreversible.

Harm to the Setting of a Nationally Important Heritage Asset

The open countryside surrounding Lyme Park, and the views both to and from The Cage, are not incidental to its significance. The setting of a heritage asset contributes to the way in which it is experienced, understood and appreciated. The sweeping views from The Cage and towards it across the surrounding landscape form part of what makes Lyme Park special and are central to the experience enjoyed by countless visitors each year. Development behind Buxton Old Road would diminish that experience by introducing a significant urban element into a currently open landscape. The resulting harm would extend beyond visual impact alone. It would erode the historic relationship between Lyme Park and its wider countryside setting and reduce the ability of future generations to experience the estate in the way it has historically been appreciated. Even if any future assessment sought to characterise such harm as "less than substantial", that would not make it insignificant. Harm to the setting of a Grade I listed building and Grade I Registered Park and Garden should attract considerable weight in making decisions regarding the Local Plan. The Council should be extremely cautious about including development that would diminish the setting of one of the most important historic landscapes in the region.

Unsuitable for Allocation

The Council should not approach this site on the basis of whether housing can physically be accommodated. The correct question is whether the site can be developed without causing unacceptable harm. In this instance, the answer is clearly no. The site's sensitivity arises not from technical constraints alone but from its landscape and heritage importance. The harm resulting from development would be inherent to the site's location. No amount of design refinement, landscaping or screening would alter the fact that it occupies a prominent position within views from The Cage and contributes to the setting of Lyme Park. For this reason, this is not merely a site that requires mitigation. It is a site that is unsuitable for allocation.

Need for Robust Assessment

Should the Council continue to consider this site despite these concerns, it should require:

- A detailed Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.
- Assessment of views both to and from The Cage and other key viewpoints within Lyme Park.
- Accurate photomontages showing the likely appearance of development.
- Assessment of visibility during winter months.
- Assessment of the effects of lighting after dark.
- A comprehensive Heritage Impact Assessment considering the setting of both the Grade I listed house and Grade I Registered Park and Garden.
- Assessment of cumulative impacts alongside existing and proposed development in the surrounding area.

Without such evidence, the true scale of the harm cannot be properly understood.

Natural Drainage, Groundwater and Ecological Function

In addition to the landscape and heritage concerns set out above, there are also concerns regarding the site's apparent role in local drainage, groundwater movement and ecological functioning. The land behind Buxton Old Road appears to contain a natural watercourse together with areas of persistently wet ground. These characteristics suggest that the site performs an important function within the local hydrological system, helping to accommodate surface water, support groundwater recharge and maintain natural drainage patterns. Such features are often integral to local ecosystems and can provide valuable habitat and foraging opportunities for wildlife. Wet ground, streams, ditches and associated vegetation frequently support biodiversity that may not be immediately apparent from strategic site assessments. Development would inevitably involve significant areas of hard surfacing, building foundations, roads and other infrastructure. These interventions can alter natural drainage pathways, interrupt groundwater movement and increase surface water runoff unless carefully managed. Whilst engineered drainage solutions can sometimes reduce these impacts, they do not necessarily replicate the natural functions of existing landscapes. Given the apparent presence of natural drainage features, the Council should require detailed hydrological, ecological and flood risk assessments before considering the site suitable for allocation. The interaction between landscape character, biodiversity, groundwater movement and surface water management should be fully understood before any development strategy is progressed. Whilst this concern is secondary to the significant heritage and landscape impacts identified above, it provides a further reason for exercising caution when considering whether this sensitive site should form part of the future development strategy for Cheshire East.

Green Belt Considerations

Although the site forms part of the Green Belt, my objection is not based solely on Green Belt designation. The more important issue is the role this land plays in preserving the rural setting of Lyme Park and maintaining the character of the landscape experienced from The Cage, along with views towards The Cage from a vast array of viewpoints and the wider landscape. If Cheshire East Council is considering releasing Green Belt land, it should first demonstrate why development cannot be directed towards less sensitive locations, including brownfield opportunities and sites that would not cause comparable harm to nationally important heritage and landscape assets. The availability of land is not, by itself, a justification for sacrificing an irreplaceable landscape setting.

The fact that the site lies outside the formal boundary of Lyme Park does not lessen its importance. The significance and setting of heritage assets do not stop at ownership or designation boundaries, and the open countryside between the existing built edge of Disley and Lyme Park forms part of the wider rural landscape in which the estate is experienced and understood. Development of this site would reduce the extent of undeveloped land separating the settlement from the historic estate and would contribute to the gradual erosion of the rural setting that underpins Lyme Park's significance and character.

The Council should also be mindful of the cumulative consequences of successive releases of countryside around Lyme Park. Whilst any individual allocation may appear limited in isolation, the incremental extension of urban development towards the estate risks progressively weakening the historic relationship between Lyme Park and the surrounding countryside. Lyme Park derives much of its significance from being experienced as a historic country estate set within a predominantly rural landscape, and the Local Plan should seek to preserve that relationship rather than permit its gradual urbanisation.

Conclusion

I strongly object to the inclusion of land behind Buxton Old Road within the Cheshire East Local Plan. This site occupies a highly sensitive position within the setting of Lyme Park and contributes to important views both to and from The Cage. Whilst existing development can be seen in the far distance, the proposed site is significantly more prominent within the view and its development would fundamentally alter the character of the landscape. The resulting

harm would be permanent, irreversible and incapable of meaningful mitigation. It would diminish the setting of a Grade I listed building and Grade I Registered Park and Garden and permanently urbanise a landscape that contributes directly to the significance and enjoyment of Lyme Park. The question for the Local Plan process is not whether houses could physically be accommodated on this land. The question is whether Cheshire East should knowingly and permanently damage the setting of one of England's most important historic estates in order to accommodate development that could be directed elsewhere. The harm from allocation would outweigh any benefit of identifying this site of development and no compelling justification has been demonstrated for its inclusion in the Local Plan. Accordingly, I request that Cheshire East Council concludes that the land behind Buxton Old Road is unsuitable for allocation, removes it from further consideration within the Local Plan process, and affords the highest level of protection to the setting, views and landscape character that contribute to the special significance of Lyme Park.