Cheshire East Local Plan Scoping Consultation Response

Site: Land West of Cooksmere Lane, Elworth, Sandbach

Sections 1 and 2: Introduction and New Local Plan

I object to the inclusion of Land West of Cooksmere Lane, Elworth as a potential housing allocation within the emerging Cheshire East Local Plan. The site comprises greenfield land within the rural setting of Elworth and should be assessed against infrastructure capacity, landscape character, agricultural land quality and sustainability. Development would result in the loss of open countryside and Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land. Cheshire East previously refused housing development on nearby land under application 17/3611C because the loss of BMV agricultural land and open countryside outweighed the benefits of development. These considerations remain relevant and should inform the assessment of this site.

Section 3: Context for the New Local Plan

Whilst increased housing provision is required, housing targets should not automatically result in the release of greenfield sites. The Local Plan should prioritise brownfield land, protect Grade 1-3 BMV agricultural land, ensure infrastructure is delivered alongside growth and safeguard settlement identity. Any consideration of countryside or Green Belt release should follow a robust assessment of brownfield capacity, infrastructure constraints and environmental impacts. Growth should be genuinely sustainable and not achieved through the unnecessary loss of productive agricultural land.

Section 4: Baseline Information and Spatial Portrait

The baseline evidence confirms the importance of agriculture, countryside and rural communities to Cheshire East. Approximately 70% of the borough is agricultural land and these characteristics should be reflected in the spatial strategy. The Local Plan should protect productive farmland, maintain the distinction between settlements and countryside, and avoid large-scale greenfield expansion that would harm the character of settlements such as Elworth and Sandbach. Future allocations should be assessed against their impact on settlement identity, landscape character and environmental quality.

Section 5: Scope of the New Local Plan

I object to the allocation of Land West of Cooksmere Lane, Elworth as a residential development site within the emerging Cheshire East Local Plan.

The site was submitted through the Call for Sites process; however, inclusion does not demonstrate suitability, availability or deliverability. The site should be subject to a comprehensive assessment against environmental, infrastructure and sustainability criteria before any further progression.

The site lies within Grade 1-3 Agricultural Land Classification and therefore comprises Best and Most Versatile agricultural land. Its development would result in the permanent loss of a finite agricultural resource. Cheshire East previously refused application 17/3611C on nearby land where the loss of BMV agricultural land and open countryside was found to outweigh the benefits of development.

The site comprises a substantial area of undeveloped greenfield land forming part of the rural setting of Elworth and Sandbach. Development would extend the built form beyond the existing settlement boundary, resulting in urbanisation of open countryside and harm to landscape character.

Consideration should also be given to any Strategic Green Gap function and any Green Belt relationship associated with the site. If the land contributes to settlement separation, particular weight should be given to preserving openness and preventing coalescence between communities.

Flood risk constraints should be fully assessed, including Flood Zone classification, surface water flood risk, drainage impacts and sustainable drainage requirements. Development should not proceed where flood risk cannot be satisfactorily managed.

The Council should assess biodiversity impacts, ecological connectivity, protected species, hedgerows, mature trees and wider green infrastructure. Any significant ecological harm should weigh heavily against allocation.

Highway capacity must be assessed in detail, including Cooksmere Lane, Marsh Green Road, Middlewich Road and surrounding junctions. The Council should demonstrate that development would not create unacceptable traffic impacts and that sustainable transport options are available, in particular construction access, phasing and logistics.

School capacity and healthcare provision should also form part of the assessment. Additional growth should not be allocated unless education and healthcare infrastructure can accommodate demand or improvements are identified and deliverable.

The Council should apply a brownfield-first approach and demonstrate that previously developed land opportunities have been exhausted before releasing productive agricultural land and open countryside.

Land West of Cooksmere Lane should be excluded from future allocation options because it would result in the loss of BMV agricultural land, harm the rural setting of Elworth, contribute to urban sprawl, place additional pressure on infrastructure and represent

unsustainable greenfield expansion. Brownfield opportunities should be prioritised ahead of this site.

Section 6: Proposed Local Plan Engagement Strategy

I support the Council's commitment to a digital-first but not digital-only engagement process, together with publication of consultation summaries and feedback reports. Communities most affected by potential allocations should receive targeted local engagement before key planning decisions are made. Community assemblies, stakeholder workshops and digital engagement should be supplemented by local events in areas directly affected by proposed growth so that residents can fully understand the evidence base and implications of site allocation decisions.

Overall Conclusion

The Local Plan should prioritise sustainable development by directing growth towards brownfield and previously developed land before considering the release of productive agricultural land and open countryside. Land West of Cooksmere Lane would result in the loss of Best and Most Versatile agricultural land, harm the rural character of Elworth, place additional pressure on local infrastructure and represent unsustainable greenfield expansion. For these reasons and all of the above, the site should be excluded from future allocation options within the emerging Cheshire East Local Plan.

Regards

Carlos Munez