1 September 2026

Cheshire East Council

Via email to localplan@cheshireeast.gov.uk

Dear Sir/Madam,

Local Plan Scoping Consultation on behalf of Highgrove Strategic Land Ltd
Land at Manor Lane, Holmes Chapel

Introduction

These representations are made on behalf of Highgrove Strategic Land Ltd (Highgrove) who welcome the opportunity to provide their views on the new Local Plan. They are very keen to work with Cheshire East Council (the Council) to help shape the Local Plan and ensure that it addresses the needs of the borough.

We have sought to broadly follow the order of the Sections, and sub-titles set out on the Council's online consultation document and also add online comments where possible. In this regard, we outlined with underscore the relevant paragraph numbers cited within the Council's online consultation text as a way of cross referencing where online comments have been made (e.g. #1.1). Relevant comments set out in this letter includes:

- **Context of the new local plan:**
  - #3.3-3.7 Increase in housing requirement

- **Baseline information and spatial portrait:**
  - #4.5 Connectivity
  - #4.6-4.10 Economic contribution
  - #4.11-4.16 Heritage, culture and natural environment
  - #4.20 Demographic mix

- **Scope of the new local plan:**
  - #5.1 Local plan period
  - #5.5-5.7 Planning for growth
  - #5.20-5.23 Settlement hierarchy
  - #5.24-5.26 Spatial distribution
  - #5.33-5.35 Affordable housing
  - #5.39-5.41 Housing for older people and specialist accommodation
  - #5.129-5.130 Jodrell Bank Observatory
  - #5.145 New evidence

- **Proposed local plan engagement strategy:**
  - #6.51-6.56 Engaging with site promoters

We note that the Council are not inviting the submission of sites (which has been undertaken through a separate call for sites process). We respect this position and can confirm that Highgrove have submitted current land interests to the Council as part of that process. For ease of reference the call for sites submission for **Land at Manor Lane, Holmes Chapel** (Site) is enclosed with this letter given that the representations are relevant to that Site in particular.

The Site is being promoted by Highgrove as a suitable site for residential-led allocation in the new Local Plan to accommodate circa 60 dwellings and a residential care home/elderly accommodation.

These representations are set within the context of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) published in August 2026 and the collection of draft Government guidance for local planning authorities titled 'Create or update a local plan using the new system'.

Ultimately, the new Local Plan will be examined to assess whether it is positive, effective, consistent with national policy, and conforms with any adopted spatial development strategy (SDS) for the area, or emerging SDS depending on its stage of preparation.

Context of the New Local Plan

#3.3–3.7 Increase in housing requirements

The new Local Plan should be based on a housing need assessment that establishes the overall number of homes needed in the area as a minimum over the plan period, using the standard method. This is currently 2,530 dwellings per annum (dpa) but will need to be kept under review as the new Local Plan progresses to consider changes in housing stock and affordability data.

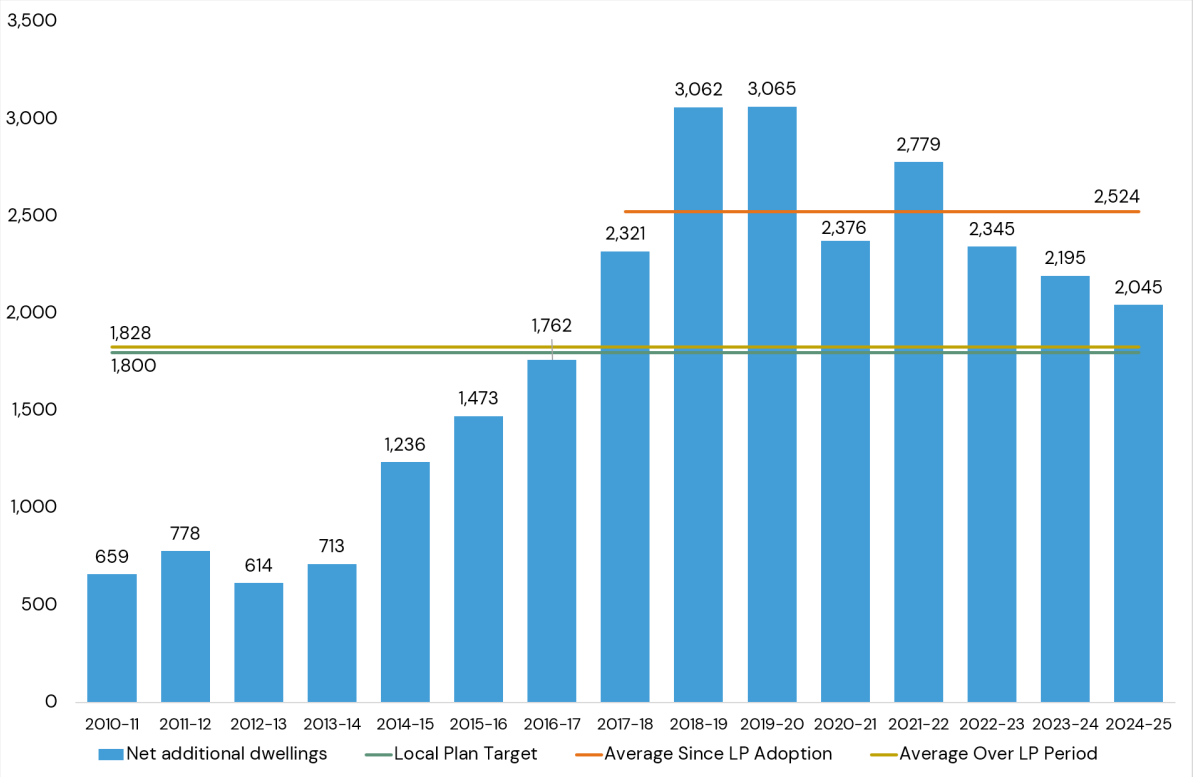
Whilst 2,530 dpa is a step-up on the adopted housing requirement of 1,800 dpa in the Local Plan Strategy (LPS), it is wholly achievable with due consideration being given to the land available within Cheshire East which is not restricted.

The adopted Local Plan figure of 1,800 dpa was based on an Objectively Assessed Housing Need Assessment that dates back to 2015; was influenced by very low/poor delivery rates incurred over the course of the early years of the plan period, and predicated on an average 0.7% jobs growth rate, which has been significantly surpassed since the start of the adopted plan period.

The former Standard Methodology was based on the 2014 Household Projections, which are now 12 years out of date, and again, was a projection of past low delivery rates within the Borough.

Cheshire East's actual net delivery of homes since the Local Plan was formally adopted in 2017, actually averages at 2,524 dwellings per annum (see Figure 1 below), which demonstrates the Borough contains a very strong housing market area, that can positively contribute to the Government's overall objectives to significantly boosting supply at a level that is consistent with the new Standard Methodology requirement.

Figure 1: Net Housing Delivery in Cheshire East



We are of the strong view that the above points should set out in any updates to the Council's Housing Evidence base to clearly demonstrate why the new Standard Method requirement is fully justified and should be treated as the minimum housing requirement for the Borough.

Baseline information and spatial portrait

#4.5 Connectivity

In light of the 2026 NPPF and its reliance on the national Connectivity Tool, it would also be prudent to include some initial information in terms of how Holmes Chapel score in this regard when considering the national and local picture.

Holmes Chapel is well-placed to support growth given its railway connectivity. Holmes Chapel fall within the Crewe Travel to Work Area (TTWA), which is a top 60 TTWA, noting this is a key policy measure within the 2026 NPPF when considering locations next to 'well connected stations' as defined by the NPPF and the policy implications towards land that are within a reasonable walking distance to such locations. Two trains per hour operate from Holmes Chapel in each direction. The station falls on the Crewe-Manchester line – with two trains per hour to Manchester and two trains per hour to Crewe.

The site benefits from being within a reasonable walking distance (as defined in Annex B of the NPPF) of Holmes Chapel train station, located approximately 300 metres away based on a real walking route. Residential development in such a location is supported by the NPPF, subject to meeting the wider policy criteria. The NPPF places strong emphasis on housing delivery and densification to increase supply, including the "default yes" approach to development around well-connected stations and the expectation for minimum densities in these areas. Development at this location should therefore be supported.

#4.6-4.10 Economic contribution

The Local Plan should make it clear that Cheshire East is strongly aligned with the wider ambitions of the UK Industrial Strategy on the basis of:

- its close geographical links and connectivity to Greater Manchester and
- it containing clusters associated with advanced manufacturing and life sciences which are both identified within the selective 8 growth sectors within the UK Industrial Strategy.

Bespak is a longstanding employer in Holmes Chapel, a point that was recognised by Members at the August Southern Planning Committee. This local employment role reinforces the need for the Local Plan to ensure that sufficient housing is provided in sustainable locations such as Holmes Chapel, where new homes can directly support the existing workforce and future recruitment needs of major employers like Bespak.

#4.11-4.16 Heritage, culture and natural environment

The Council recognises Jodrell Bank Observatory (JBO)'s status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. We consider it important that the Council clearly distinguishes between:

- the heritage significance of Jodrell Bank as a designated heritage asset, including the Grade I listed Lovell Telescope; and
- the technical and operational significance of the wider astrophysical observatory and the extensive safeguarded area surrounding the site.

The two concepts are separate and should not be married together, particularly in light of recent Government announcements that Jodrell Bank will no longer be receiving further Government grants and funding, which we make further representations at #5.129-5.130.

#4.20 Demographic mix

Whilst we note that this section provides only high-level demographic information for the Borough, we consider it essential that the Local Plan also identifies the proportion of households with occupants in need of care and elderly residents. This is a key demographic indicator that will

directly influence where the Council may need to deliver, support, and prioritise specialist accommodation for older people over the plan period.

Highgrove's site in Holmes Chapel is able to contribute positively to this need. The site has the potential to deliver care home provision or specialist accommodation for older residents, aligning with both demographic trends and the Council's wider objectives to plan for an ageing population.

Scope of the new local plan:

#5.1 Local plan period

The Local Plan period should extend beyond the proposed 15 years, taking account of several key strategic considerations that will shape growth across Cheshire East over the coming decades. We note that the 2026 NPPF has reduced the recommended minimum requirement to 10 years under Policy PM2: Local Plan.

Notwithstanding this, we would welcome a scenario where the CEC Local Plan (alongside the CWAC Local Plan and Warrington LP) cover at least a 25 year plan period and are prepared on an evidence base that takes account of the 30 year investment programme for the Combined Authority.

A Local Plan that is prepared with at least a 25 year horizon and plan period could clearly direct the production of an SDS that could either be adopted at the same time as the Local Plan, or failing that be in a position where it could be progressed and adopted quickly in light of the fact that the Local Plans will have done a lot of the heavy lifting already. Indeed, this would be consistent with Part 1b of Policy PM2: Local Plans, which states:

> ***'Local Plans can cover a longer time period where this would, for example, help support the delivery of longer-term infrastructure or strategic development'***

Importantly, the 10-year period is a minimum requirement. Where strategic development forms part of the spatial strategy (such as new settlements or significant extensions to existing towns and villages), national policy expects a vision that looks much further ahead, typically at least 30 years, to reflect the realistic timescales for delivery.

Further to the Council's devolution agreement and the formation of the Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority, we note that a devolution agreement has been set that seeks to focus £650 million worth of investment fund over 30 years. We also note that the region's first mayoral election is scheduled for May 2027.

The emerging Cheshire and Warrington devolution deal is expected to significantly increase economic activity across the combined authority area. The devolution process is advancing in parallel with the preparation of the new Local Plan and will bring enhanced transport connectivity, new investment, and improved employment opportunities across the boroughs.

The new Local Plan must identify broad locations for long term housing growth that can support and align with the combined authority's economic ambitions. Settlements with strong employment bases and excellent transport connectivity, such as Holmes Chapel, is a logical and sustainable location for accommodating this future growth.

The 2026 NPPF also introduces Policy PM1, which sets out expectations for Spatial Development Strategies at a sub-regional scale. This is particularly relevant in the context of the combined authority. Policy PM1 requires a strategy for a sustainable pattern of growth over at least 25 years, recognising that a proportion of this growth will need to be accommodated within Cheshire East. The Local Plan must plan positively for this requirement by identifying broad locations for growth.

#5.5-5.7 Planning for growth

We note that the scale of development to be planned for is not fixed and will be informed by the emerging evidence base. We will comment further once the Council publishes evidence on housing demand. However, we note that paragraphs 5.5 to 5.7 appear to focus on the production of need assessments for housing and employment and exploring 'opportunities for regeneration'.

The 2026 NPPF makes it clear that the objectives of the policies contained within:

- Chapter 6: Delivering a sufficient supply of homes is to 'support the delivery of a substantial increase in the supply of homes…'; and
- Chapter 7: Building a strong, effective economy is to 'enable businesses to invest, expand and adapt in a way that reflects the opportunities, challenges and characteristics of different areas and supports long-term economic growth both locally and nationally'.

In the context of housing, we emphasise that the Standard Method figure represents a **minimum** requirement at 2,530 dwelling per annum. However, the PPG highlights that housing requirement may be higher than the identified housing need, and authorities should consider the merits of planning for higher growth if, for example, this would seek to reflect economic growth aspirations. This is reaffirmed under **Policy HOU2: Setting requirement figures for homes** within the 2026 NPPF, where part 3b states the housing requirement figure should:

> *'Be higher than the overall figure identified in the local housing need assessment where appropriate and that this will include situations where a housing requirement is necessary to meet the needs of neighbouring areas or to reflect growth ambitions linked to economic development or infrastructure investment.'*

In short, if the minimum housing requirement as set by the SDS or the Standard Methodology is not sufficient to meet the growth or infrastructure investment ambitions of the Council and the economic vision for the area, the housing requirement should be increased.

In the context employment and economic needs, NPPF **Policy E1: Providing the conditions for long-term economic growth** makes it clear that this should start with a clear economic vision

and strategy, which takes a positive, proactive and realistic approach to encouraging sustainable economic growth in urban and rural areas, having regard to the UK Industrial Strategy and relevant strategic and local strategies for economic development and regeneration. It goes onto confirm that it is not just existing business needs that should be considered but also wider needs and opportunities for economic growth and investment including relevant market signals and propriety places for investment in key sectors as set out in the UK Industrial Strategy and other programmes such as Industrial Strategy Zones and AI Growth Zones.

In short, whilst it will be necessary for the Local Plan evidence base to assess past growth and land take up to explore the potential need for employment land, NPPF Policy E1 requires a more proactive and visionary approach to be adopted and clearly points to the need to positively identify opportunities for growth.

Based on the Council's latest Annual Monitoring Report (2024/25) as set out in Table 1 below, Cheshire East's jobs growth has fluctuated year on year (seemingly due to more recent changes influenced by Brexit, the pandemic and possibly the Ukraine War). Prior to this, however, jobs growth was very strong. Data shows that prior to Brexit and the pandemic, Cheshire East was successful in generating new employment, with an average of over 3,500 new jobs created year on year between 2010 to 2019 (equating to an average annual jobs growth of +1.9%).

However, the years following the pandemic have shown the local authority to be struggling to maintain employment increases, with job numbers falling from a high of 206,000 in 2019 to 201,000 in 2020. This equates to an annual average loss of jobs at -2.4%.

Over the course of the plan period, however, jobs growth has still average 1.3% per annum and this is still significantly higher than the 0.7% jobs growth the adopted plan was predicated on which led to the adopted Local Plan (and LPS inspector) concluding that an average annual housing target of 1,800 per annum. Based on this alone, this would suggest that the new Local Plan should be targeting an employment growth and investment strategy that looks to achieve at least 1.3% jobs growth per annum and in our view, it should be higher to capitalise on the locational advantages of the Borough and key sectors that align with the UK Industrial Strategy.

Table 1 - Employment / Jobs Growth 2010-2024

Year	Cheshire East Jobs	Annual Change	Annual Jobs Growth Change (%)
2010	174,000	/	/
2011	176,000	2,000	+1.1%
2012	178,000	2,000	+1.1%
2013	181,000	3,000	+1.7%
2014	189,000	8,000	+4.4%
2015	195,000	4,000	+2.1%
2016	199,000	4,000	+2.1%
2017	203,000	4,000	+2.0%
2018	197,000	-6,000	-3.0%

2019	206,000	9,000	+4.6%
2020	201,000	-5,000	-2.4%
2021	204,000	3,000	+1.5%
2022	204,000	0	0.0%
2023	208,000	4,000	+2.0%
2024	210,000	2,000	+1.0%

Indeed, in terms of generating additional jobs growth going forward, Cheshire East still has an excellent foundation to build upon. Holmes Chapel is a clear example of this strength. It accommodates Bespak, a major employer in the advanced manufacturing and life sciences sector, specialising the production of inhaled and nasal drug-delivery.

This fit neatly within the Government's Modern Industrial Strategy for the UK, issued in November 2025 and noted under the 2026 NPPF Policy PM1. The Strategy targets eight sectors with the highest potential for productivity, exports, and job creation:

- Advanced Manufacturing
- Clean Energy Industries
- Creative Industries
- Defence
- Digital and Technologies
- Financial Services
- Life Sciences; and
- Professional and Business Services.

These sectors are expected to drive national productivity, support the net zero transition, and create 1.1 million new jobs by 2035. Cheshire is referred to within the document in relation to Life Sciences and Chemical production in the context of boosting growth in Northern City regions and clusters. The Industrial Strategy also makes reference to improving the connectivity across the North of England, which is now being picked up through the Northern Powerhouse Rail project. It also highlights how the Government will remove blockers in the planning system to drive the economy forward and encourage growth.

The 2026 NPPF embodies the Government's latest planning reforms but there are also wider initiatives planned by the Government in terms of tax reform and other interventions that purposefully seek to put the UK back onto a high growth agenda, as highlighted in the Industrial Strategy. In short, such reforms are targeting greater levels of jobs growth and productivity.

The Local Plan and its evidence base must clearly recognise that Holmes Chapel's economic contribution is nationally relevant, and that its ability to support advanced manufacturing and life sciences growth is coupled with providing more housing in a sustainable, well-connected location. For these reasons, we consider that Holmes Chapel should be identified as a key location for future residential growth to ensure that its economic potential can be fully realised.

#5.20-5.23 Settlement hierarchy

Whilst there is no specific requirement in national policy to set a hierarchy of settlements through the Local Plan it is noted that the Council will establish a settlement hierarchy as part of the future planning strategy with the intention of informing the spatial distribution of development, the approach to site allocations and the definition of settlement boundaries.

It is noted and welcomed that the Council are currently collating evidence to inform a review of the settlement hierarchy, considering provision of services and facilities, population, jobs, sustainable transport, retail provision and settlement form. Comments may be made on that evidence in due course as it is expected to be published as part of the subsequent 'plan content and evidence' consultation next year.

Alongside the review of the settlement hierarchy, it is expected that the infrastructure required to support growth in settlements will be explored though the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP). It will be necessary to get a handle on how future development may be able to enhance the role, function and sustainability of settlements through improved infrastructure provision and helping to underpin and attract new services and facilities in specific settlements.

Highgrove welcome discussions with the Council as this Site is of such a scale that it can provide supporting infrastructure to assist in accommodating growth in Holmes Chapel.

At present, Holmes Chapel is identified as a Local Service Centre; however, given its existing range of services, strong connectivity and employment role, we consider that it is capable of functioning as a Key Service Centre. We set out detailed representations on this point in the following sections.

#5.24-5.26 Spatial distribution

Highgrove support the preparation of new evidence to underpin the new Local Plan, including a report on the spatial distribution of development. We agree that the Local Plan will need to set out a clear spatial strategy and distribution of development once the extent of need is identified. However, the evidence base and draft Local Plan should also take account of clear opportunities for development particularly where it is evident that the environmental impacts would be limited, yet the development of land would still positively contribute to economic and social objectives of the NPPF and Local Plan more widely.

Such an approach would tie in with the fact that the housing requirement set by the Standard Method is a minimum requirement and the Government are seeking to significantly boost the supply of land for housing and identified opportunities to grow the wider economy. In short, the allocation of sites does not strictly need to be tied to need but can also be geared towards unlocking and positively planning for suitable development opportunities where they exist, are available, deliverable and suitable and would positively contribute to the Government's wider growth agenda.

Holmes Chapel has excellent connection to the M6 via Junction 18 and benefits from a train station and a range of other services, which we consider tip Holmes Chapel into a Key Service

Centre category. It would be found to be well placed to address a substantial proportion of the housing requirement since:

- Holmes Chapel is not constrained by Green Belt or Strategic Green Gap designation.
- Holmes Chapel is not constrained by the Peak District National Park Fringe which includes land to the east of Macclesfield, north, east and south of Bollington, and south east of Congleton.
- Holmes Chapel is not constrained by Local Landscape Designations which include land to the north of Knutsford, north of Wilmslow, west of Handforth, east of Alderley Edge, north and west of Macclesfield.
- Holmes Chapel provides ready access to shops, services, amenities, major employment opportunities, and railway infrastructure.

Despite not being surrounded by Green Belt, the sustainable growth of this settlement has been severely hampered by the Jodrell Bank Consultation Zone with ongoing objections from the University of Manchester with (in our view) limited credible evidence relating to the true/tangible impacts of development on the success of its continued role and operation.

It will be important for the Local Plan to provide a credible and sustainable growth strategy for Holmes Chapel particularly noting that the Council abandon the Jodrell Bank SPD. Significantly less weight should be afforded to the current consultation zone because superior technology elsewhere and far removed from Jodrell Bank now provides the most effective and efficient data. Whilst Jodrell Bank's heritage significance should be recognised, development in Holmes Chapel should not be constrained by the consultation zone where no heritage harm can be evidenced. (see further comments on this in #5.129-5.130).

#5.33-5.35 Affordable housing

It is noted and welcomed that the Council are to prepare a housing needs assessment to identify the key housing issues that the Local Plan will need to address, including the need for affordable housing, housing for older people, specialist accommodation, self-build and custom housebuilding, and the mix of dwelling sizes and tenures across the borough.

The Council already note that there are geographical variations in affordability across the borough, and that more evidence will be needed to understand these differences and how they could be addressed. This evidence is welcomed, as is the Council's commitment to consider evidence on development viability. Comments may be made on that evidence in due course as it is expected to be published as part of the subsequent 'plan content and evidence' consultation next year.

In terms of affordability, the affordability ratio of the borough on adoption of the current LPS in 2017 was 7.65. Since adoption the affordable ratio has risen to an average of 8.25, only dropping

below 7.65 most recently in 2025. This would suggest that the LPS was ineffective in lowering affordability ratios or has taken some time to take effect in lowering the ratios.

Moving forwards, there will need to be clear evidence on the extent of the affordable housing needs within the borough, to what extent those needs should be addressed, and how this informs the ultimate housing requirement in the new Local Plan. An increase in the total housing figures included in the Local Plan should also be considered where it could help deliver the required number of affordable homes[1].

#5.39-5.41 Housing for older people and specialist accommodation

We agree with the Council that demand for specialist accommodation will likely to continue to increase, and we note our site's potential to help meet this need. Our view is that localised needs should be clearly identified by the Council at plan making stage to ensure that appropriate forms of specialist housing can be planned for in the right locations.

#5.129-5.130 Jodrell Bank Observatory

We have enclosed previous representations made to the Council in February 2022 which were issued to the Council's Draft Jodrell Bank SPD, which has since been abandoned. We consider much of the objections content is still highly relevant, particularly in light of recent Government announcements that Jodrell Bank will no longer be receiving further Government grants and funding.

First of all, it is important that the background context of the UNESCO status is duly considered and interpreted. We feel the Criterion cited within the World Heritage Committee (WHC) papers would be best quoted in full in the new Local Plan as these will be important considerations for any decision maker going forward. We have included the full text of the four criteria below:

- ***Criterion (i):*** *Jodrell Bank Observatory is a masterpiece of human creative genius related to its scientific and technical achievements. The adaptation and development of radar and radio frequency reflectivity to develop radically new equipment, such as the Transit Telescope and Lovell Telescope, were a key part in the development of entirely new fields of scientific research and led to a dramatic change in the understanding of the Universe. The Observatory was important in the pioneering phase and later evolution of radio astronomy.*

- ***Criterion (ii):*** *Jodrell Bank Observatory represents an important interchange of human values over a span of time and on a global scale on developments in technology related to radio astronomy. The scientific work at Jodrell Bank was at the heart of a global collaborative network. In particular, several important technological developments such as very large paraboloidal dish telescopes and interferometer were developed at the*

[1] Paragraph: 024 Reference ID: 2a-024-20190220, Planning Practice Guidance

Observatory, and were later influential in scientific endeavours in many parts of the world.

- ***Criterion (iv):*** *Jodrell Bank Observatory represents an outstanding example of a technological ensemble which illustrates a significant stage in human history (1940s-1960s) – the transition from optical astronomy to radio astronomy and the associated consequence for the understanding of the Universe through multi-wavelength astrophysics. The property is also associated with the peacetime development of 'Big Science' as a major change in the way in which scientific research was supported and undertaken. The surviving evidence at the property related to the evolutionary development of radio astronomy from the post-war pioneering phase through to sophisticated, large scale research activity in the field makes Jodrell Bank an outstanding example of such a technological ensemble.*

- ***Criterion (vi):*** *Jodrell Bank Observatory is directly and tangibly associated with events and ideas of outstanding universal significance. The development of the new field of radio astronomy at the property lead to a revolutionary understanding of the Universe which was only possible through research beyond the possibilities of optical astronomy to explore the electromagnetic spectrum beyond visible light. Understanding of the nature and scale of the Universe has been dramatically changed by research in radio astronomy at the Observatory.*

What is clear from the above Criterion is that much of the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) status is derived from the relatively complete nature of JBO and the relevance of past findings and observations and how they have furthered human understanding of the universe. No reference of the Consultation Zone or the future role of JBO is highlighted within the Criterion above.

Within the background WHC paper there is also reference to the site's isolated rural location, '**which required an absence of radio interference**' (note past tense). It is also noted that '**The ongoing scientific use of the Observatory is an important attribute reflecting the continuity of research**'. However, it is important to highlight that the WHC reports do not specifically refer to the ongoing efficiency of the telescopes themselves, nor does it rule out other forms of research being the mainstay function of JBO going forward. Indeed, the recommendations to the State Party offered as part of the OUV status states the following:

> *'Recommends that the State Party give consideration to the following:*
> *a) Providing a summary end of project report following completion of the current major conservation project,*
> *b) Confirming the timeframe for the conservation of the two Botany Huts,*
> *c) Continuing to respect and portray the historical character of the buildings and site development. This character often includes relatively primitive buildings, often with additions undertaken with little regard to aesthetics or quality construction,*

d) Providing the revised Conservation Management Plan and associated Site Gazetteer when completed, to the World Heritage Centre,
e) Considering master planning for the property and buffer zone to anticipate possible future development needs.'

It is not strictly true to suggest that the preserving the current efficiency/status quo of the radio telescope is absolutely paramount to the heritage status of the site. Indeed, the above recommendation suggests that the WHC were open to some change being necessary within the Consultation Zone / Buffer Zone to meet anticipated possible future development needs but this should be master planned appropriately.

There is no evidence within the WHC reports in relation to the extent to which the buffer zone has protected the observatory's functionality/efficiency or what the baseline position is in relation to interference. There is also no reference to the existing communities located within the buffer zone within the WHC reports. Instead, the vast majority of the WHC reports and findings relate to the JBO site itself, the physical structures within it and past observations. Overall, the WHC reports highlight how JBO was at the very forefront of events and ideas of outstanding universal significance and continues to play an important role. However, going forward the UNESCO OUV status will principally seek to protect and enhance the historic aspects of the site and will ultimately limit the extent to which new telescope infrastructure could be developed on the site particularly if this undermined those aspects of the site that were relevant to the early pioneering credentials of the property.

The UNESCO criteria also make it clear that the JBO represents an important interchange of human values over a **span of time** and on a global scale when it comes to radio astronomy. As such, this further reinforces the importance of clearly articulating how the facilities at JBO functioned during its pioneering role, how they function now, and how they will be utilised going forward into the future within the SPD.

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) announced in July 2026 that it would withdraw its annual funding for JBO, which previously amounted to £2.8 million per year. UKRI stated that future investment would be directed towards projects delivering “the greatest long-term impact”. Funding for e-MERLIN will continue until May 2028, and the University of Manchester will continue to own and operate the Lovell Telescope. These changes indicate a diminishing operational role for JBO within the national research landscape.

The Square Kilometre Array Observatory (SKAO) headquarters is located at Jodrell Bank. The scientific data it relies upon is collected through the Square Kilometre Array (SKA) telescopes in South Africa and Australia, locations chosen specifically for their superior radio-quiet environments. The headquarters receives approximately £15 million fundings annually and employs almost 200 staff, with the majority funded through international contributions from SKAO member countries. The UK is investing £327 million into SKAO between 2021 and 2030[2].

[2] https://www.ukri.org/publications/what-stfc-is-investing-in/factsheet-jodrell-bank-e-merlin-and-ukri-funding/

Since the appended representations were issued, construction of the SKA Observatory commenced in December 2022[3] and it has also now reached its first construction and verification milestones, with the first 1,024 antennas now in operation and proven[4]. This evidence demonstrates that the future of radio astronomy is increasingly centred on international facilities rather than the Jodrell Bank telescope itself.

While we recognise the JBO site remains at the forefront of research activity, technological advances mean that the Jodrell Bank telescope itself no longer needs to be located on-site for JBO to fulfil its global scientific role. This further reinforces the reduced need for an extensive safeguarding zone, which dates back to 1973 at a time when Jodrell Bank was a critical site in terms of its advanced technology. In light of these global developments, significantly less weight should be afforded to the current consultation zone because superior technology elsewhere and far removed from Jodrell Bank now provides the most effective and efficient data.

Whilst we note that the 1973 Directive persists and the Council are required to consult with the University of Manchester on planning applications and development proposals within the zone, we consider the above facts and the new CEC Local Plan represents a clear milestone for the Council and the Government to undertake an independent and up to date review of the genuine implication towards delivering sustainable development within this part of the Borough vs the scientific impacts at a local and global scale.

We suggest that the new Local Plan should support development proposals where it can be clearly demonstrated that there would be no unacceptable heritage impact on JBO. Highgrove's land interest in Holmes Chapel lies on the fringe of the existing settlement boundary, and there is no visual or functional relationship between these sites and JBO. In this context, development in Holmes Chapel should not be constrained by the safeguarding zone where no heritage harm can be evidenced.

#5.145 New evidence

Highgrove support the preparation of new evidence to underpin the new Local Plan. We note the various evidence-based reports that are listed. The Council will also need to prepare or review the following:

- Updated Settlement edge review for those settlements that are not impacted by Green Belt
- Accessibility Toolkit evidence

[3] https://www.skao.int/en/news/441/ska-observatory-celebrates-start-telescope-construction-australia-and-south-africa
[4] https://www.skao.int/en/news/659/first-construction-milestone-australia

- An indoor built facilities study, playing pitch strategy update, and open space assessment and strategy.

Proposed local plan engagement strategy:

#6.51-6.56 Engaging with site promoters

It is encouraging that the Council seeks to work positively and proactively with the development industry to assess, select and refine development opportunities. A transparent, proportionate and plan-led approach is endorsed but this need not be at the expense of individual discussions. That said, it is acknowledged that to ensure fairness and avoid any perception of preferential treatment, the Council will only enter into discussions on the merits of individual sites at appropriate stages within the process. Engagement will be focused on clarifying process, evidence requirements, timescales and informing the development of site-specific policies in order securing the best outcomes for communities.

Highgrove are committed to providing as much information as possible on this Site, particularly how it can provide facilities for the community. When the Council come to consider sites in more detail, please do not hesitate to contact me using the details provided below so that swift and informative responses can be provided.

Conclusions

This representation has been prepared on behalf of Highgrove in response to the Council's consultation on the Local Plan Scoping documents. We understand that the scoping documents provide only a high-level overview at this early stage of engagement. Nevertheless, we have set out our views on the essential considerations that should inform the next stage of the plan-making process.

Highgrove support the preparation of a new Local Plan for Cheshire East and are committed to working constructively with the Council to help shape a strategy that increases the delivery of new homes across the borough. They wish to ensure that the Local Plan is evidence-based, positively prepared, and capable of meeting the needs of existing and future residents.

We would like to be kept informed of all forthcoming consultations on the Local Plan and any associated documents.

Yours sincerely