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By email only

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Cheshire East Council
(Strategic Planning Team)
Delamere House
Delamere Street
Crewe
CW1 2LL

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Cheshire East Local Plan Scoping consultation (Muller Property Group)

Muller Property Group (MPG) has compiled a rational assessment of the most appropriate directions of growth in 5 of Cheshire East's most sustainable settlements: Crewe, Macclesfield, Holmes Chapel, Nantwich and Sandbach. This takes account of obvious physical barriers, highways capacity, accessibility, reasonable walking distance and, by extension, the most suitable locations for growth in each town.

Housing allocations should be located in the most sustainable locations, with particular emphasis on the new NPPF's (August 2026) pursuit of development within "*reasonable walking distance*" of a "*well-connected station" (S5:1.h.i & ii.).*

> *NPPF Policy S5:1.h.ii.* allows, outside settlements:
>
> *h. Residential and mixed-use development which would:*
>
> > *ii. Be physically well-related to the station or the settlement within which the station is located; [unless adverse effects outweigh benefits]*

The foreword to Chapter 2 of the new NPPF reinforces the approach taken by Muller Property Group's assessment borne out in this letter:

> *"**2. Plan-making policies***
>
> *... The preparation of development plans allows people to influence development in their area, including directing growth to the most appropriate and sustainable locations, mitigating and adapting to climate change, supporting regeneration and conserving and enhancing the quality of the built and natural environment."*

In this regard, housing allocations in Cheshire East's emerging Local Plan should be directed primarily to the most sustainable settlements, where commuting and other journeys are possible by rail. Muller Property Group consider the following settlements (Crewe, Macclesfield, Holmes Chapel, Nantwich, Sandbach) to most effectively comply with the new NPPF's sustainable growth agenda.

The following table shows actual and percentage growth between the 2001 and 2021 Censuses in Cheshire East's Principal Towns of Crewe & Macclesfield and the 8 Key Service Centres, but also in 2 of the Local Service Centres (Holmes Chapel and Bollington), which have both seen considerable, disproportionate growth. Unfortunately, the table makes clear that the second largest and most sustainable settlement in Cheshire East (Macclesfield) has not taken a fair or proportionate level of growth. The most obvious reason being the presence of Green Belt. Conversely, some of the smallest settlements have seen the greatest growth compared to their size. To ensure that housing growth is directed to where it is best able to be supported by existing infrastructure and is needed the most, then this significant anomaly must be redressed in the emerging plan, particularly in the dire situation of Macclesfield - the 2nd largest town, but having taken amongst the lowest percentage growth:

Population growth in Cheshire East - between Censuses 2001 and 2021 - sorted by %

	2001	2021	Growth	Growth %
Nantwich	13,617	18,740	5,123	38
Sandbach	15,403	18,935	3,532	23
Holmes Chapel	5,669	6,670	1,001	18
Congleton	25,768	30,005	4,237	16
Crewe	65,669	76,437	10,768	16
Wilmslow	23,129	25,725	2,596	11
Middlewich	13,101	14,425	1,324	10
Alsager	14,178	15,505	1,327	9
Bollington	6,622	7,235	613	9
Macclesfield	51,277	54,345	3,068	6
Knutsford	12,656	13,255	599	5
Poynton	13,391	13,010	-381	-3

Crewe

Of course, the most sustainable locations still comprise Crewe, with its railway hub, which should continue to deliver housing across a range of sites. In particular, to the north-east of town, an area which remains undeveloped, despite being more sustainably located, closer to the town centre, services, facilities and railway station than most of Crewe's existing outlying areas. Land to the north-east is also not cut-off from the town by the very railway infrastructure which Crewe was built upon, as is the case with land to the south of the town where access is constrained by the Nantwich and Shrewsbury Line.

Land to the north-east of Crewe on the other hand remains untapped, despite its ready vehicular access along the A534 road to Sandbach. It is the A534 itself which provides a strong defensible boundary and would prevent Crewe from coalescing or merging with Haslington to the east. Land to the north-east of Crewe demonstrates the most obvious potential for the town's intrinsic growth, with the substantial degree of highways infrastructure already in place to accommodate this growth.

Macclesfield

However, Macclesfield, with its fast rail links to Birmingham, Manchester, Stoke and London has evidently under-delivered substantially on its housing target, due to the housing allocations chosen through Cheshire East's previous Local Plan Strategy (adopted 2017). This has left a deficit of housing types across the board, from market to affordable. Most glaringly, this is due to the final abandonment of the 950-home Danes Moss scheme in June 2025, when the council's Economy and Growth Committee agreed to withdraw its reserved matters applications and the Housing Infrastructure Fund agreement. If development had proceeded, it would have led to the loss of rare lowland peatbog, adjacent to Danes Moss SSSI. Where those 950 homes' worth of need go instead is now a live question for the new plan and analysed here.

The options for growth at Macclesfield are further limited by peat soils to the north of Congleton Road, tightly drawn Green Belt encircling the town, land rising towards the Peak District in the east, alongside the physical barrier posed by the canal and the potential for coalescence with Bollington. However, it is an illusion that Prestbury and Macclesfield remain separated by Green Belt. Whilst the boundary is washed over by Green Belt in a *policy sense,* it is evident from the actual situation on the ground that the built-up area of Prestbury meets Macclesfield at Macclesfield Road and, as such, the Green Belt boundaries should be redrawn to reflect this.

Due to the ongoing suppression of housing supply in Macclesfield, there will have been an exponential rise in "hidden households". These are often referred to in housing policy and data as concealed households or part of hidden homelessness and comprise extra individuals or families living within another primary household because they cannot access independent housing. As such, they mask the true level of housing need in the area, as official statistics may show stable occupancy while actual demand for new homes is much higher.

Macclesfield now desperately needs realistic and deliverable replacement housing allocations. A glance at the Green Belt map of Macclesfield shows that the Green Belt has artificially supressed natural and sensible growth options for many years. Macclesfield has avoided commensurate growth, relative to its size, whilst allowing the smaller, less connected, less sustainable settlements to take the strain instead. Macclesfield, as largest town in this part of Cheshire has the infrastructure to sustain significant growth, particularly in areas which make little contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt, where sprawl and coalescence would not factor, such as the incongruous finger of green belt to the east of Prestbury Road and north of the recent Bloor scheme which was won at appeal in August 2026. This area is surrounded by Macclesfield on three sides and is amongst the closest potential development sites in proximity

to the facilities and services of both Macclesfield and Prestbury, making it one of the most sustainable locations on the edge of Macclesfield to relieve restraints on housing growth.

Holmes Chapel

Holmes Chapel is now, essentially, a small town. Whilst this is certainly true in population size (6,700), it now has much improved access to jobs, services and facilities, both intrinsically and, via a fast train journey to Crewe, Stockport or Manchester. Since preparation of the previous Local Plan commenced some 15 years ago, the town is now served by a small Sainsburys and large Aldi supermarkets, alongside a High School, Leisure Centre, Cricket, Tennis and bowls clubs, community centre, business centre, employment, pubs, restaurants, banking, health services and of course, good bus services and trains from its railway station. However, owing to its small centre, the town is often misunderstood and miscategorised as a village. Similarly, Cheshire East's Local Plan Strategy Policy PG 2: 'Settlement Hierarchy' identifies Holmes Chapel only as a third tier *Local Service Centre*. However, Holmes Chapel functions differently in that its excellent range of facilities, shops and services are dispersed throughout this compact town. It is able, theoretically, to sustain all its own needs, alongside providing a base with good access for rail and road commuters to nearby towns via A-roads and the M6.

It is time that Holmes Chapel is viewed as a 2nd tier Key Service Centre (KSC) in the settlement hierarchy. In this regard, Holmes Chapel is certainly on a par with facilities in Alsager (population: 15,505) and Handforth (pop: 6,715), which are both categorised as KSCs. When compared with Cheshire East's other Local Service Centres (LSCs) Holmes Chapel, alongside Bollington are, by far, the largest of the current crop of those villages. However, Holmes Chapel offers a more diverse range of facilities, services, unparalleled access and better public transport connectivity, especially by rail. Given the centrality of Holmes Chapel to Cheshire East's geography and its comparative isolation, serving a broad rural hinterland, Holmes Chapel makes a strong case for promotion to Key Service Centre in the emerging Local Plan.

Nonetheless, Holmes Chapel is on the cusp of the Jodrell Bank buffer zone, based on the Jodrell Bank Radio Telescope Consultation Zone which has operated to effectively protect the Observatory for many decades. It was established by the Town and Country Planning (Jodrell Bank Radio Telescope) Direction 1973. The Consultation zone protects the scientific capabilities of the Observatory from radio emissions in its vicinity, to maintain its functional integrity. However, the Consultation Zone has been downgraded in recent years by Cheshire East's decision to build a link road to the north and west of Congleton to provide access to housing allocations for over four thousand new homes, through adoption of the Local Plan Strategy in 2017. These housing allocations were placed *inside* the Jodrell Bank Radio Telescope Consultation Zone, but specific conditions were applied to subsequent permissions requiring electromagnetic shielding mitigation, which include well-fitted foil-backed plasterboard, specialised glazing, or other Faraday-cage-style building techniques to limit radio frequency interference. Such measures were not widely available in 1973 and were certainly not incorporated into new build dwellings of the time. However, building technology now allows us to mitigate against radio interference and therefore, to build inside the Jodrell Bank buffer zone, as witnessed in Congleton.

There is no evidence that these measures at Congleton have not been effective in mitigating the impact of electronic devices on the functioning of the radio telescope. By extension, it is therefore entirely feasible for Holmes Chapel to be subject to significant growth during the forthcoming plan period, by applying the same planning conditions to prevent radio interference from household electronic devices.

Compared to some settlements, such as Macclesfield, Holmes Chapel lies adjacent to significant tracts of unconstrained, developable land. Land west of Holmes Chapel and south of Middlewich Road, in particular, has ready vehicular access off the A54 and is contained by the strong defensible boundaries of the M6 to the west and the River Croco to the south. This area lies on the far side of Holmes Chapel from Jodrell Bank and has significant potential as an area of search for housing allocations during the forthcoming Local Plan period.

Nantwich

Nantwich is particularly limited over which direction its future growth will take, despite being unimpacted by Green Belt. Growth to the north of Nantwich has reached its effective limits to prevent the urban area from merging with the small neighbouring villages of Acton, Reaseheath and Alvaston. Common Land is a further constraint preventing northerly growth. Looking at growth to the east of Nantwich, there is a very real risk of urban coalescence occurring with Crewe, alongside further Common Land acting as a constraint. The potential for Nantwich to expand to the west can be immediately ruled out by the Battle of Nantwich Battlefield of 1644, which is on Historic England's Register of Historic Battlefields for its special historic interest. The canal also acts as a defensible boundary and a physical barrier, whilst Dorfold Hall is a Grade II listed Park and Garden occupying the remaining land west of Nantwich.

This leaves the south of Nantwich as the sole remaining direction of suitable growth. This would pose no overriding constraints to the continued and necessary expansion of the town as a well-located, sustainable and in-demand settlement where residents actively seek to live. Good access is already in place via existing, quality roads - the A529 Audlem Road and A51 London Road. Both roads provide regular bus services to Nantwich - the no. 39 to Stapeley every 2 hours along London Road and the no. 53 to Audlem and Leighton Hospital every 2 hours on Audlem Road. Both Audlem and London Road have pavement along their entire lengths for at least one mile, creating a sustainable and accessible area of search for future growth. Certainly, the ribbon development strung out southwards from Nantwich along both roads suggests a sense of pre-ordained destiny for this side of the town.

Sandbach

Growth to the west of Sandbach / Elworth is somewhat limited by the Sandbach Flashes, The Moat Nature Reserve and not least by the physical barrier posed by the Trent and Mersey Canal and the narrow roads of low-capacity which cross it. The railway also acts as a barrier with the A533 (London Road) bridge providing the only viable road crossing with any capacity for increased traffic. Furthermore, land accessed from London Road and contiguous with Elworth

is restricted by listed buildings, whose historic settings also extend over land to their rear. There is also the threat of sprawl if Sandbach were to grow in the direction of the former Albion Chemical Works which, in turn, could lead to eventual coalescence with Middlewich.

To the north of Sandbach, there are few physical barriers to outward growth, however, because access is necessary from the increasingly narrow estate roads and country lanes, highways capacity remains a major constraint and growth north of Sandbach is necessarily finite.

Growth to the east of Sandbach remains feasible with access taken from the A533 (The Hill) spine road, but is limited by noise constraints of the M6 motorway.

The potential for future southern extensions of Sandbach provides the broadest range of site opportunities. Once again though, the greatest constraint is Highways. The A534 is a fast and high-capacity arterial road, built to bypass Wheelock, Winterley, Haslington and Sandbach. Its primary limitations are junction capacity at Sandbach and Crewe, whilst secondary roads are prone to street-parking and bottlenecks. As such, the nearer development can be located to the A534, the better. In terms of the limits to southerly growth, the River Wheelock floodplain and the Trent and Mersey Canal together provide strong and effective defensible boundaries to Sandbach's growth. Given the highways capacity, there would be no new publicly funded link-roads required to achieve growth ambitions south of Sandbach.

MPG trust that the high level direction-of-growth assessment in this letter provides a useful summary of the most appropriate locations for housing allocations in Crewe, Macclesfield, Holmes Chapel, Nantwich and Sandbach.

Kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

PAUL EMMS MRTPI
Planning Manager