Formal Representation: Objection to SHELAA Submission for Land at Ashley
12 Contiguous Parcels Totalling 291.03 Hectares

To: Spatial Planning Team, Cheshire East Council

I am writing to register a firm formal objection to the inclusion and consideration of the 291.03-hectare land submission around Ashley within the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) and the wider Local Plan review.

The submission comprises **12 interconnected and contiguous parcels extending to a total of 291.03 hectares**. The scale and location of this proposed development are fundamentally inappropriate. In my view, the evidence demonstrates that the land is **unsuitable, unavailable and undeliverable for strategic development** and should not be identified for future Local Plan allocation.

The principal reasons are set out below.

1. Ashley is fundamentally unsuitable for strategic-scale development
Ashley is a small rural settlement within Cheshire East's **Other Settlements and Rural Areas** tier and is identified as an infill village. It is not a Principal Town, Key Service Centre or established strategic growth location.
The Cheshire East spatial strategy recognises that the scale of development should be proportionate to the function and character of individual settlements and that the majority of growth should be directed towards locations with established infrastructure, employment, services and sustainable transport.
A development extending across **291.03 hectares and 12 contiguous parcels** would be entirely disproportionate to Ashley's existing scale and function. It would not constitute limited infill or modest village growth; it would represent a fundamental transformation of a small rural community into a major development location.
Ashley does not possess the schools, healthcare provision, employment opportunities, commercial services or high-frequency public transport required to support a strategic population increase of this scale.
Directing major growth to such a location would therefore conflict with the principles of sustainable development contained within **CELPS Policies PG 2, SD 1 and SD 2**, as well as the wider spatial strategy of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

2. Fundamental conflict with Green Belt purposes
The proposed land lies within the Green Belt and forms part of an important area of open countryside separating the Greater Manchester conurbation from the Cheshire settlements to the south.
The NPPF identifies the purposes of Green Belt land as including:

- checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- preventing neighbouring towns from merging into one another;
- safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- preserving the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- assisting urban regeneration.

The Ashley land performs particularly important functions in relation to **urban sprawl, settlement separation and the protection of open countryside**.
Development around Ashley would extend built development southwards from the Greater Manchester conurbation and substantially reduce the remaining open gap between settlements including Hale and Altrincham to the north and Mobberley and Knutsford to the south.
This is not an isolated or contained development opportunity. The cumulative effect would be to weaken the physical separation between distinct communities and create a significant risk of progressive urbanisation and settlement coalescence.
The scale of the proposed allocation is therefore fundamentally inconsistent with the purpose of maintaining the openness and permanence of the Green Belt.

3. The land does not present the characteristics of an appropriate Grey Belt site
The current national planning framework does allow for the identification of certain Green Belt land as "Grey Belt". However, this does not create a general presumption in favour of development.
The current framework requires assessment of whether land strongly contributes to the relevant Green Belt purposes and whether other protected interests provide strong reasons for restricting development. Any

development must also be in a sustainable location and must not fundamentally undermine the purposes of the remaining Green Belt.
This land is **open, productive agricultural land**, rather than previously developed land. It performs important Green Belt functions, particularly in preventing urban sprawl, maintaining the separation between settlements and safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.
Those characteristics are reinforced by the site's landscape, ecological, heritage, agricultural, flood-risk, transport and aviation constraints.
The site should therefore not be treated as a low-performing or logical Grey Belt release opportunity.

4. Severe transport and highway constraints
The transport infrastructure surrounding Ashley is fundamentally unsuitable for strategic-scale residential development.
Rail
Ashley railway station provides only a limited service and has very restricted parking provision. It cannot provide the high-frequency, high-capacity public transport necessary to support a major new population.
Of particular significance, the March 2026 Parliamentary debate concerning the proposed Cheadle railway station recorded Transport for Greater Manchester modelling which contemplated reducing services at **Ashley, Plumley and Mobberley from hourly to every two hours** in order to accommodate Cheadle services. The debate described the consequence as effectively undermining rail travel to those communities.
This is directly relevant to the question of whether Ashley can reasonably be regarded as a sustainable location for major housing growth.
Highway network
The surrounding highway network consists predominantly of narrow rural roads, with significant pinch points and constrained crossings.
In particular, the network contains narrow bridge crossings over the railway, the River Bollin and Birkin Brook.
These physical constraints cannot readily accommodate the substantial increase in vehicle movements that would result from development on this scale.
The cumulative effect would be increased congestion, pressure on already constrained routes and heightened highway safety risks, particularly towards the A538, M56 and surrounding settlements.
This conflicts with **CELPS Policies CO 1 and CO 4** and the NPPF's requirement that development should provide safe and suitable access for all users.

5. Manchester Airport safeguarding and aircraft noise constraints
The land is located beneath operational flight paths associated with Manchester Airport and is affected by aviation-related constraints, including aircraft noise and bird-strike considerations.
Introducing a substantial new residential population into an area subject to these constraints raises significant issues of residential amenity, public safety and aerodrome safeguarding.
The relationship with Manchester Airport therefore represents a further material constraint on the suitability of the site for high-density residential development and requires careful consideration under **CELPS Policy SE 12** and the relevant aviation safeguarding requirements.

6. Significant ecological and biodiversity impacts
The proposed allocation would result in the urbanisation of a large, contiguous area of currently open agricultural land.
This would fragment existing habitats, interrupt ecological connectivity and place pressure on surrounding habitats and protected sites.
Of particular importance is the relationship with **Cotterill Clough Nature Reserve and SSSI**, which forms part of the wider ecological network in the area. Development on this scale risks severing or degrading habitat corridors and increasing disturbance, traffic and other pressures on sensitive ecological receptors.
The land also provides habitat for UK Red-Listed bird species including **grey partridge, tree sparrow and greenfinch**.
These impacts are directly relevant to **CELPS Policy SE 3 (Biodiversity and Geodiversity)** and the biodiversity provisions of the NPPF.

7. Serious landscape and heritage impacts
The scale of the proposed development would permanently transform the character of the Ashley countryside.

The land forms part of an important open landscape associated with the **Bollin Valley and Parklands Local Landscape Designation** and the **Rostherne/Tatton Park Local Landscape Designation**.
Large-scale housing development would introduce extensive built form, roads, lighting, infrastructure and associated urban activity into a predominantly rural landscape, fundamentally altering its openness and visual character.
There are also significant heritage considerations.
The open agricultural setting contributes to the significance and setting of **19 Grade II listed buildings, including Ashley Hall**. The introduction of large-scale development into this setting would risk causing substantial harm to the historic character and rural context of these designated heritage assets.
These matters engage **CELPS Policies SE 4 and SE 7** and the relevant national heritage policies, which require considerable weight to be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets and their settings.

8. Loss of Best and Most Versatile agricultural land
The proposed allocation would result in the permanent loss of a very substantial area of productive agricultural land.
Available land-quality evidence, including survey information associated with the **HS2 Phase 2b work**, indicates that much of the area comprises **Grade 2 and Subgrade 3a Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land**.
This is not a matter of losing a small, isolated agricultural parcel. The submission comprises a large and substantially contiguous area of productive farmland.
The permanent conversion of such land to housing should therefore be considered against national policy requirements to recognise the benefits of BMV agricultural land and, where significant development of agricultural land is necessary, to prefer poorer-quality land.
The availability of brownfield and other previously developed opportunities elsewhere should be properly considered before sacrificing a strategically important area of high-quality agricultural land.
This represents a further material conflict with **CELPS Policy SE 2** and the relevant provisions of the NPPF concerning agricultural land and the effective use of land.

9. Flood risk, drainage and water-management constraints
Parts of the area, particularly towards the M56, are already susceptible to flooding and surface-water problems.
The development of the areas submitted would inevitably introduce extensive areas of impermeable surface, including buildings, roads, driveways and other hardstanding.
Without exceptionally robust drainage and attenuation infrastructure, this would increase surface-water runoff into the River Bollin catchment and could exacerbate flood risk both within and downstream of the site.
The scale of the proposed development therefore raises serious concerns under **CELPS Policy SE 13 (Flood Risk and Water Management)** and the NPPF's flood-risk and water-management policies.
The existence of these constraints should be treated as a fundamental consideration when assessing the site's deliverability.

10. Major infrastructure and utility deficiencies
There is also a fundamental question as to whether the infrastructure necessary to support development of this scale exists or could realistically be provided.
The area does not currently possess the level of utility, sewerage, electricity-grid and drainage infrastructure that would be required to support a strategic development of this magnitude.
Any proposal would therefore require substantial infrastructure investment and potentially significant off-site works.
Under **CELPS Policy IN 1**, infrastructure requirements and their deliverability are fundamental considerations in determining whether a site is genuinely deliverable.
The fact that infrastructure might theoretically be capable of being provided in the future should not be confused with evidence that a site is presently deliverable or represents a sustainable location for strategic growth.

11. The cumulative impact is decisive
Importantly, these constraints should not be considered in isolation.
The site is not affected by one individual planning constraint that could simply be mitigated through a conventional development proposal. Instead, the 291.03-hectare submission is affected by a **combination of mutually reinforcing constraints**, including:

- Green Belt purposes and settlement separation;
- an inappropriate rural settlement hierarchy;

- inadequate public transport;
- severe highway and bridge constraints;
- Manchester Airport safeguarding and aircraft noise;
- ecological and biodiversity sensitivity;
- landscape designations;
- heritage assets and their settings;
- Best and Most Versatile agricultural land;
- existing flood-risk and drainage concerns; and
- significant infrastructure and utility requirements.

The cumulative effect is critical.
A development of this scale would require the surrounding infrastructure, landscape and environment to accommodate a wholly new urban area rather than a proportionate extension to an existing sustainable settlement.
The question is therefore not simply whether individual constraints could theoretically be mitigated. The fundamental question is whether **Ashley is an appropriate and sustainable location for strategic development of this magnitude in the first place**.
The evidence strongly indicates that it is not.

Requested Action
For all of the reasons set out above, I respectfully request that Cheshire East Council:

1. **Record all 12 contiguous parcels, totalling 291.03 hectares, as Unsuitable, Unavailable and Undeliverable within the SHELAA assessment;**
2. **Do not identify the land as a preferred or potential strategic housing allocation within the Local Plan review;**
3. **Do not treat the land as an appropriate Grey Belt release opportunity; and**
4. **Exclude the 12 parcels from future Local Plan allocations on the basis of their combined spatial, environmental, transport, infrastructure, agricultural, heritage and flood-risk constraints.**

The proposed development would represent an unprecedented transformation of Ashley's rural character and would conflict with the established spatial strategy of Cheshire East as well as important national planning objectives.
The combination of Green Belt function, unsustainable settlement location, inadequate transport and infrastructure, high-quality agricultural land, environmental and heritage sensitivities, aviation constraints and flood-risk considerations makes this land fundamentally inappropriate for strategic development.
I therefore respectfully request that the Council concludes that the **291.03-hectare submission is unsuitable, unavailable and undeliverable for strategic development** and that all 12 parcels are excluded from future Local Plan allocations.