Keep Greenside Green

Cheshire East Council (Strategic Planning Team)
Delamere House,
Delamere Street,
Crewe,
CW1 2ll.



www.keepgreensidegreen.co.uk

August 31st 2026

Cheshire East New Local Plan Scoping Consultation

Representation concerning CFS26 590, Land north of Birtles Road

Keep Greenside Green recognises that CFS26 590 is a submitted site rather than a proposed allocation. We are providing this evidence so that the site's known constraints are properly recorded and considered before it progresses through the Local Plan site-selection process. Taken together, they show that this is not a suitable or realistically deliverable housing site.

1. Green Belt, spatial strategy and prevention of sprawl

CFS26 590 is not an enclosed or weakly performing part of the Green Belt. It is a large, open site extending northwards from the existing edge of Macclesfield. Housing lies mainly along its southern side, while the land to the north and west remains open countryside. To the east are paddocks, stables and other rural uses, rather than a continuous built-up boundary. The private track also runs along only part of that boundary.

The Council has assessed this land before. CFS26 590 falls within parcel MF11, which the Council's 2015 Green Belt Assessment found made a "Significant Contribution" to preventing the unrestricted sprawl of Macclesfield. The adjoining parcels MF08 and MF09 received the same assessment. That previous evidence should be the starting point, and any different conclusion should be clearly explained, as very little has changed to the land during the current local plan period.

The shape of the site is particularly important. Development would create a long narrow extension of housing projecting into the countryside. Annex E of the National Planning Policy Framework specifically identifies an extended "finger" of development as a good indicator that land is making a strong contribution to preventing sprawl.

The promoter's submission says that consideration could be given to merging CFS26 590 with land to the north or east. This reinforces the concern about the future direction of development. If the site were developed on its own, it would create a poorly contained finger into the Green Belt. If it were combined with further land, it would extend development even further into the surrounding countryside.

The landowners immediately east of the site, including ourselves, have not put land forward for the latest call for sites. That land is actively used for a stables business, a horse and donkey retirement sanctuary and private amenity.



Resident produced map of existing land use, eastern edge of CFS26 590

Under the Agent of Change principle, any proposal would need to show that new housing could coexist with the established stables and sanctuary without restricting their operation. Any necessary separation or mitigation should be reflected in the developable area.

The current NPPF requires new Green Belt boundaries to be “defined clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be defensible”. The submission identifies no feature along the proposed northern or eastern edge.

On the evidence currently available, CFS26 590 continues to make a strong contribution to Green Belt Purpose A. It should not be treated as grey belt or taken forward as a housing allocation.

2. Road access, highway safety, sustainable travel and local infrastructure

The promoter’s submission says that there are “a number of existing vehicular access points” with direct access to an adopted highway. It does not identify which access would serve the development or provide evidence that a safe junction could be constructed. For a development of around 400 homes, the existence of field gates is not evidence that suitable estate access can be provided.

The options are Birtles Road and Sandy Lane, feeding onto Whirley Road. Both are narrow rural roads with significant constraints. Birtles Road has no continuous pavement, limited width in places and several pinch points formed by existing properties, walls and hedgerows. Sandy Lane is narrower still, with poor pedestrian provision and sections where two vehicles cannot comfortably pass. Any widening, new pavement or visibility works is likely to require the removal of established boundaries and the use of land outside the promoter’s control.



Birtles Road example of 5m road width



Sandy Lane section single track

The private track along part of the eastern boundary will not be made available for access. We also own the approximately one-third-acre parcel marked “Play Space” at the Birtles Road frontage. It is not offered for sale or access, lies beside a narrow section of the road and must be excluded when assessing possible highway and utility works.



Privately owned paddock labelled “Play Space”

Previous council planning decisions have formally acknowledged the access constraints of Whirley Road. Specifically, under Planning Permission 17/4277M for the adjacent LPS 18 site, Cheshire East required all access to come from Chelford Road and strictly prevented access onto Whirley Road 'in the interests of highway safety.'

These roads have not been materially improved since then, while on-street parking by residents of the new estate has reduced the usable width.

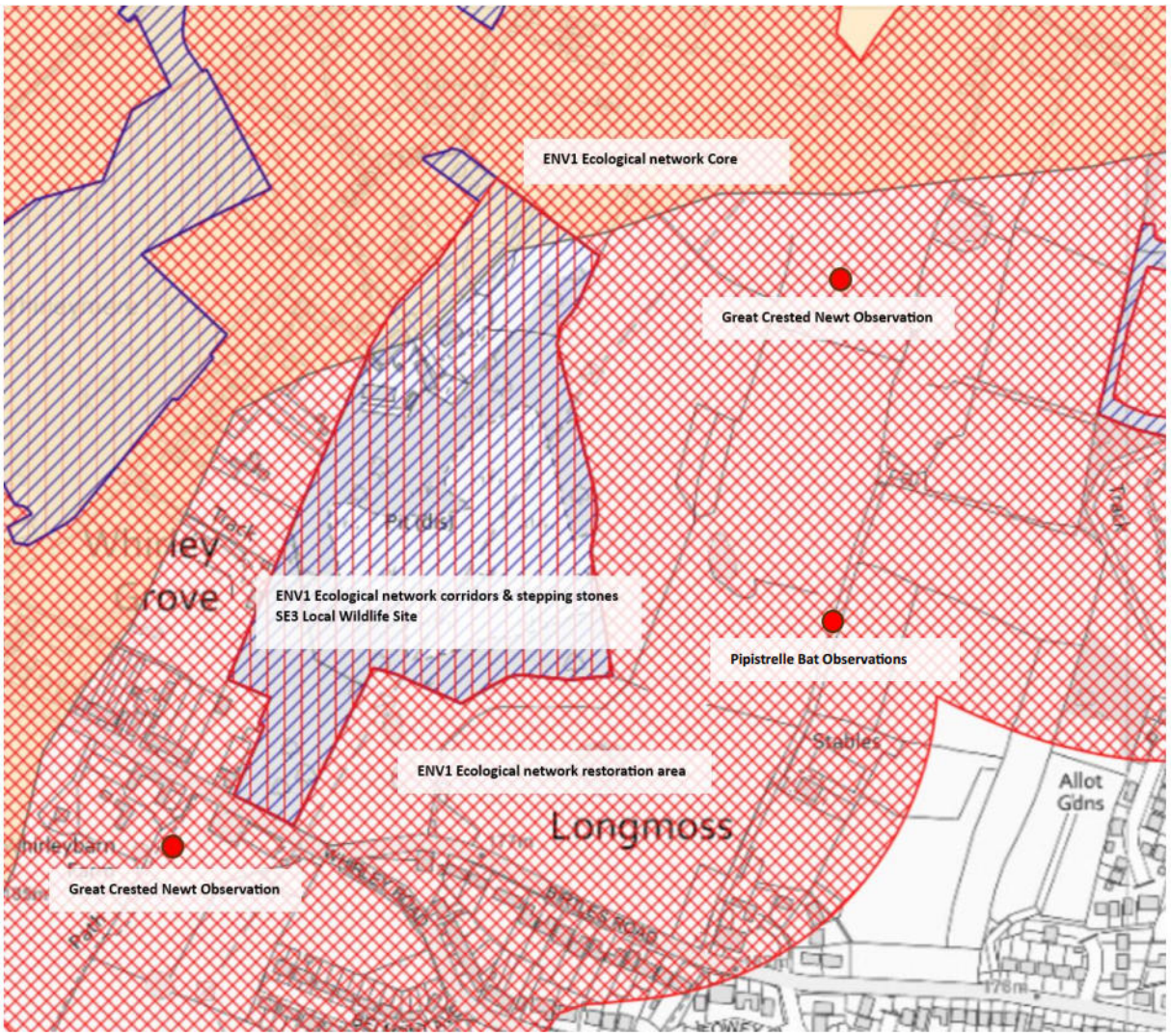
There is no continuous safe walking or cycling route from the site along Birtles Road and Sandy Lane, and no deliverable alternative has been demonstrated.

Whirley Primary has 212 pupils against a stated capacity of 210. For September 2026 it allocated 31 places against a PAN of 30, with a furthest allocation distance of 0.406 miles. Its constrained site leaves no obvious room for expansion, so the Council should establish how additional primary capacity would be delivered.

3. Wildlife, habitats and ecological connectivity

CFS26 590 lies immediately beside the Whirley Sand Quarry Local Wildlife Site and contains three ponds, with other ponds immediately adjoining it. Mature hedgerows, trees and field boundaries connect these ponds to the quarry and the surrounding countryside.

The Council's ecological network map shows the northern part of the site as part of an ENV 1 Core Area, with the land farther south identified as a Restoration Area. Any access from Sandy Lane would pass through the Core Area. Access from Birtles Road would require the removal of established field-boundary hedgerows visible in the Cheshire Tithe maps.



Resident prepared map of Cheshire East ENV1 Policies and NBN Records

The NBN Atlas contains two Natural England great crested newt records within the submitted boundary at SJ888748: NE_GCN_6300, dated 9 April 2015, and NE_GCN_6344, dated 10 April 2015. A further record at Whirley Barn, SJ88267444, dates from 20 June 2019 and confirms use of the immediate surrounding area as well as ponds.

We regularly observe large numbers of pipistrelle-type bats along the eastern farm track and can provide video evidence. Seasonally appropriate surveys should assess bat activity and potential roost features in mature trees and nearby buildings.

The retention of ponds, hedgerows, terrestrial buffers and connected dark corridors must be reflected in the claimed 13.6-hectare developable area. No ecological assessment accompanied the submission, and a proportionate, seasonally appropriate assessment should cover the site, access works, adjoining Local Wildlife Site and cumulative effects.

4. Adjacent landfill, contamination and groundwater

The former Sandy Lane Landfill at Whirley Quarry lies immediately beside CFS26 590. The Environment Agency's register records Sandy Lane Landfill Site at Whirley Quarry under permit KP3092CX and Waste Management Licence 53470. The permit dates from 1979 and describes the activity as a landfill taking non-biodegradable waste.

A September 2025 REFA desk study for proposed development at 185A Whirley Road (25119/GEDS) cites historical records of 1,250 tonnes of asbestos brake and clutch linings, and an Environment Agency entry giving the landfill a recorded size or capacity of 75,000 tonnes. Although prepared for another site adjacent to the landfill area, it recommended intrusive investigation, groundwater sampling and six months of ground-gas monitoring.

The Council's 2012 SHLAA entry for overlapping site 3514 described it as "directly on landfill" and not currently developable. Monitoring points remain visible in the field, and a contractor told a local resident that quarterly sampling was being undertaken for the Environment Agency. The Council should confirm who operates these points, what is monitored and whether the results are available.

Groundwater protection is relevant here. The Council's constraints mapping identifies groundwater or source-protection considerations affecting the site. Policy ENV 17 requires a source-pathway-receptor assessment, together with assessment of groundwater risks and appropriate mitigation.

The Council has confirmed that it did not receive the supporting documents referred to in the promoter's form. There is therefore no evidence showing how the claimed 13.6-hectare developable area accounts for landfill and groundwater constraints. The Council should require an appropriate risk assessment and, where indicated, intrusive investigation, with capacity and viability recalculated after any buffers or remediation.

5. Landscape and heritage

The site is undulating grazing land divided by mature hedgerows, trees and ponds. Birtles Road forms a clear transition from Macclesfield's built edge to open countryside. Development would replace that transition with an irregular urban frontage extending around Greenside.

Policy ENV 3 requires local distinctiveness and cumulative landscape effects to be considered. The nearby Alderley Edge and West Macclesfield Wooded Estates Local Landscape Designation is one of the borough's valued landscapes. As no landscape assessment or masterplan accompanied the submission, a landscape and visual assessment is required.

Roewood Farm at 94 Birtles Road is also relevant and has been submitted to Cheshire East's Built Heritage Team for consideration as a potential non-designated heritage asset. It is an historic farmhouse with an eighteenth-century core, including old roof timbers and traditional York stone roof. Its position beside the private farm track, mature boundaries and adjoining open fields contributes to its rural setting and helps explain its origins and character.



Roewood Farm



View of the property from Birtles Road

Before land affecting its setting is allocated, the Council's Built Heritage Team should assess the farmhouse and determine whether it has sufficient architectural or historic interest to be treated as a non-designated heritage asset.

Historic mapping shows the long-established track, field boundaries and hedgerows around Roewood Farm. Any highway works should identify the resulting loss of hedgerows, trees, walls and verges rather than treating it as an engineering matter.

6. Flooding, drainage, utilities, pylons and realistic capacity

The CFS26 590 submission itself acknowledges that the site has "drainage issues", localised areas of potential surface-water flooding and overhead power lines.

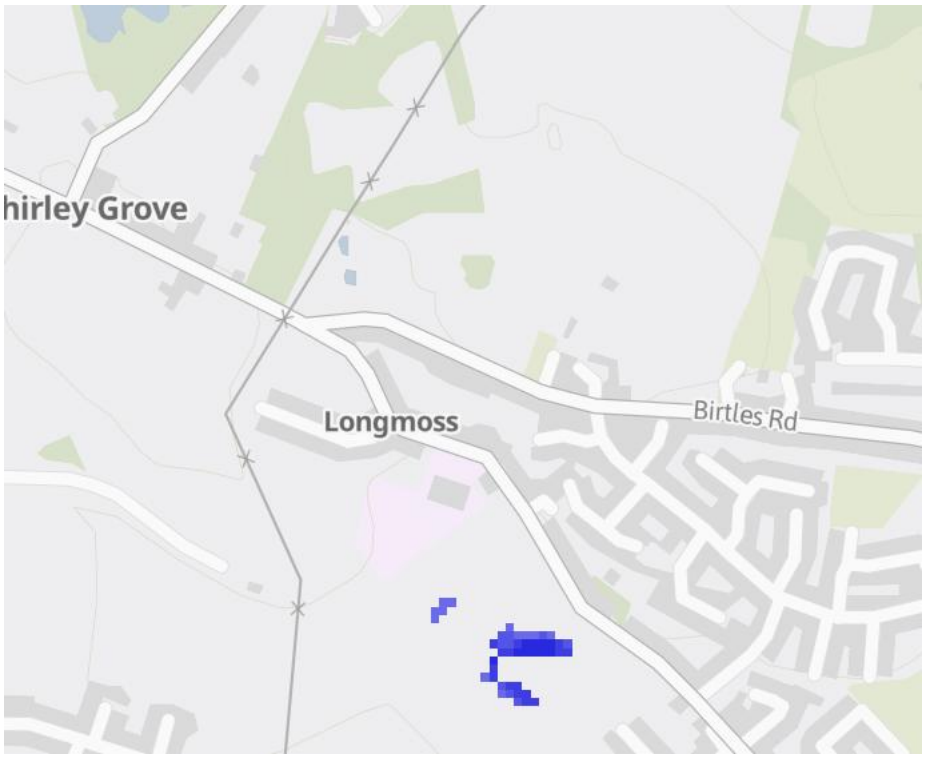
Residents see water collect regularly on the lower part of the field near Birtles Road, close to the area from which a southern access would appear most likely. An example is attached. The land falls appreciably towards this lower corner and the soil is heavy and slow-draining clay. Significant drainage issues have also been reported by residents along Sandy Lane with the lane becoming covered in ice in winter.



View onto site from Birtles Road, 1.04pm 2nd January 2024

Policy ENV 16 requires no increase in greenfield runoff and favours surface-level SuDS. Land needed for drainage must therefore be reflected in the capacity calculation, alongside the site's groundwater source-protection designation and possible landfill contamination.

The wider area is historically known as "Longmoss", a name associated with wet or boggy ground. Although national mapping does not show peat within CFS26 590 itself, peat is recorded in fields immediately to the south and parts of this site are repeatedly waterlogged. This does not prove that peat is present, but it warrants site-specific peat-depth and ground investigation in those areas before the land is treated as developable. Any peat deposits would add to the drainage, construction and carbon constraints and could further reduce the usable area of the site.



National Peat Map logging of peat in the fields south of Whirley Road

Foul drainage provision is unclear. Sandy Lane properties use septic tanks, and no evidence has been provided of a foul-sewer connection or sufficient treatment capacity for approximately 400 homes. United Utilities should confirm the connection, available capacity, any reinforcement and its delivery timetable.

The overhead power lines are another substantial physical constraint. The promoter acknowledges them and refers to "buffer zones around existing overhead power lines". Even where housing can technically be positioned nearby, the layout must avoid creating poor-quality or difficult to market homes, or open spaces dominated by the lines.

There is also an issue with the delivery assumptions. The submission gives an annual build rate of 35 dwellings. At that rate, 400 homes would take more than eleven years to complete, even before allowing for site preparation and major infrastructure.

The Council should require a constraint-led plan showing how the claimed 13.6 hectares and 400 homes accommodate drainage, utilities and overhead-line constraints.

Overall deliverability

Taken together, the issue is not any single constraint but their cumulative effect. CFS26 590 covers 19.228 hectares, yet the promoter already identifies only 13.6 hectares as developable. Four hundred homes across 13.6 hectares equates to approximately 29.4 dwellings per developable hectare. Across the full area of Green Belt being submitted, it is only around 20.8 dwellings per hectare, poor yield for land performing an important green belt role.

No supporting plan has been provided to explain the missing 5.6 hectares or show how access, ponds, protected species, ecological links, the adjoining landfill, groundwater, drainage and SuDS, pylons, landscaping, heritage and landownership have been accommodated. Several of these matters do not appear to have been addressed in the submission at all. While some mitigation areas may serve more than one purpose, their combined effect is still likely to reduce the usable area further.

That uncertainty does not justify permanently moving the long-established Green Belt boundary at Birtles Road. The land has previously been assessed as making a significant contribution to preventing the unrestricted sprawl of Macclesfield, and development would create a poorly contained finger into the countryside.

In our view, CFS26 590 has too many unresolved constraints and too little supporting evidence to progress to the next stage of the Local Plan.

Prepared by Gareth Wilson

On behalf of the Keep Greenside Green Residents Group
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