



Cheshire Community Action response to the Cheshire East New Local Plan Scoping Consultation – August 2026

Cheshire Community Action welcomes the opportunity to comment on the scope of the new Cheshire East Local Plan.

CCA works with rural communities, parish and town councils, community buildings, neighbourhood planning groups and voluntary organisations across Cheshire. Our response focuses on the need for the Local Plan to connect housing growth with the services, facilities and community infrastructure that make places sustainable.

Growth and sustainable communities

The new Local Plan is being prepared at a time of considerable housing pressure. Cheshire East is expected to accommodate a substantially higher level of housing growth than under the existing Local Plan, while also addressing pressures relating to affordability, infrastructure and the five-year housing land supply.

CCA recognises the need for new homes. However, the central question should not be simply how many homes are delivered, but whether growth creates stronger and more sustainable communities.

Across rural Cheshire, communities frequently report that housing growth has not been matched by improvements in public transport, health services, schools, shops, drainage, digital connectivity or community facilities. In some places, the population has increased while local services have been reduced, centralised or lost.

This creates a risk that settlements grow in size while becoming less sustainable and more dependent on private cars and services elsewhere.

The Local Plan should therefore be based on an infrastructure-led and place-based approach. Housing, employment, transport, community facilities and public services should be planned together, with infrastructure delivered alongside development rather than after pressures have emerged.

Rural housing and rural needs

Rural housing need is not simply a smaller version of urban housing need. Many villages face high house prices, limited rented accommodation, ageing populations and difficulty retaining younger households, local workers and families.

New housing in rural communities can help sustain local services, but only where it responds to genuine local need. Too often, development produces larger market homes while the greatest need is for affordable housing, social rented housing, smaller homes, accessible properties and opportunities for older residents to downsize.

The Local Plan should provide a positive framework for rural exception sites, small-scale development and community-led housing where these are supported by local evidence and contribute to the long-term sustainability of a settlement.

A borough-wide housing assessment will be important, but it should be informed by parish-level evidence, rural housing needs surveys and neighbourhood plans. Housing pressures vary significantly between communities and cannot always be understood through borough-wide averages.

The emerging Cheshire and Warrington Rural Needs Analysis should also inform the Local Plan. The analysis highlights the interconnected nature of rural housing, transport, digital connectivity, skills, service access and community infrastructure. These issues should be considered together rather than through separate policy areas.

Community buildings and facilities

CCA welcomes the recognition in the consultation that village halls, places of worship and other community facilities are important to community life.

These buildings should be understood as essential social infrastructure. Village halls and community centres are no longer used only for meetings and social events. They increasingly host health and wellbeing services, childcare, advice, exercise, adult learning, digital access, cultural activities and emergency support.

In many rural communities, they are the last remaining publicly accessible building and provide a base for both voluntary activity and public service delivery.

Housing growth creates additional demand for these facilities, but it can also place pressure on buildings that are already ageing, expensive to operate or dependent on volunteers. The Local Plan should protect valued community facilities and support their improvement, flexible use and long-term sustainability.

Where larger developments are proposed, community facilities should be considered from the outset rather than treated as an optional addition. Investment should reflect not only the cost of constructing a building, but also how it will be managed and sustained over time.

Neighbourhood planning

Cheshire East has a particularly strong neighbourhood planning tradition, with a high number of made and emerging neighbourhood plans across the borough.

These plans represent a significant investment of community time and contain valuable evidence about local housing needs, infrastructure, design, green spaces and community facilities. They should be treated as an important foundation for the new Local Plan.

The Local Plan process should work with parish and town councils and neighbourhood planning groups to understand where local evidence remains current and where communities may need to review their plans in response to changing housing requirements and national policy.

The new Local Plan should complement neighbourhood plans rather than duplicate or unintentionally undermine them. Where strategic requirements conflict with locally identified priorities, this should be explained openly and discussed with communities at an early stage.

The Combined Authority and wider strategic context

The Local Plan will sit within the developing strategic framework of the Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority.

The Combined Authority's priorities include housing, transport, skills, investment, economic growth and strategic planning. These priorities reinforce the need to consider development as part of a wider system rather than as a series of individual housing allocations.

The Local Plan should help ensure that future Combined Authority investment reaches rural communities as well as larger towns and urban centres. This includes investment in public and community transport, digital infrastructure, affordable housing, community assets and access to employment and skills.

The relationship between the Local Plan and the emerging Spatial Development Strategy will be particularly important. Strategic housing and economic growth should be accompanied by clear plans for the infrastructure and community capacity needed to support it.

Role of the VCFSE sector

The voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sector has an important role in land use and place development.

VCFSE organisations own and manage buildings and land, deliver health and social services, operate community transport, develop community-led housing and energy projects, and support residents who may not engage through formal consultation processes.

The sector is therefore more than a stakeholder to be consulted. It is a delivery partner and a source of detailed local evidence.

The Local Plan process should provide meaningful opportunities for VCFSE organisations to contribute to the evidence base and to discussions about housing, health, community facilities, social value and infrastructure.

This will be particularly important in rural communities, where voluntary organisations and community buildings often help fill gaps left by reduced or centralised services.

Conclusion

CCA supports the preparation of a new Local Plan that enables the homes and economic development Cheshire East needs.

However, growth should be judged by whether it produces sustainable, connected and inclusive places, not only by the number of homes delivered.

For rural communities in particular, this means addressing housing affordability, access to services, transport, digital connectivity and community infrastructure together. It also means making full use of the evidence and local leadership already provided by neighbourhood plans, parish and town councils, community organisations and the wider VCFSE sector.

CCA would welcome continued engagement with Cheshire East Council as the evidence base, spatial strategy and detailed policies are developed.

For further information about this response, please contact:

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