

## **Comments on Cheshire West and Chester Council's Local Development Framework Core Strategy Topic Papers**

The following is Village Design Statement Committee's full response to the consultation Topic Papers. These are documents that will remain live throughout the LDF development process and anyone may comment on them at any time. They can be found on the CWaC web site in the Planning section (type Topic papers in the search field) should anyone wish to read and comment on them.

### **1) GENERAL COMMENTS**

- a) The figures quoted for commuting to and from the CWaC Borough confirm that the greatest commercial and employment links are within the county of Cheshire, Warrington and North Wales. Linking the borough with Liverpool as a Sub Region is an unacceptable concept with no commercial justification whereas the sub region of CWaC and Warrington is justified and as such, attracts regional funding allocations.
- b) There are significant overlaps in papers such as Bio Diversity and Transport e.g. cycle ways, which causes some confusion. The following comments have only been entered against one topic paper heading,

### **2) BIODIVERSITY**

- a. This paper includes references to several Village Design Statements but omits the VDS prepared by Mickle Trafford which was among the earlier submissions. It is now under review.
- b. Question 15 ~ Encouraging and providing public access needs to be carefully balanced against the need to leave significant areas undisturbed in order to encourage biodiversity and maintain wildlife habitats e.g. areas such as the SSSI adjacent to the Shell refinery.
- c. Question 14 ~ Plans should include detailed requirements for the Goway Landfill site to be developed in a manner conducive to encouraging biodiversity as each tipping area is completed. The plans should also include for a green corridor along the Goway to link the site with the Shell SSSI.

### **3) WATER**

Question 11 ~ there is a growing need for water storage reservoirs along the Goway to balance the winter water surpluses with summer droughts which are predicted to get worse as a result of climate change.

### **4) STRATEGIC SITES**

Plans should include development controls on land between Chester and Ellesmere Port in order to maintain a green belt. The two towns should not be allowed to merge and should not be linked through a Chester Rural Gateway.

### **5) SETTLEMENT HIERARCHY**

Question 7 ~ Option 2 should be used and the questionnaire extended to include care homes and the adequacy of any community facilities e.g. Mickle Trafford quadrupled in size but village hall facilities remained untouched and now severely limits potential activities such the provision of youth clubs etc. Currently the village is little more than a collection of housing estates.

## **6) TRAVEL AND TRANSPORT**

Question 11 ~ Key point 14 refers to cycleways. Plans one now well advanced to link Mickle Trafford with the Chester cycleway but those plans do not include the provision of safe access to the village which is split in half by the A56. Linking settlements to safe cycle ways is an essential prerequisite to encouraging greater use.

## **7) HOUSING**

- a. Question 6 ~ 80% development on Brown Field sites is the most desirable and sensible option.
- b. Question 8 ~ The Green Belt must be maintained to separate the settlements and fulfil the role they were planned to do. They should not be eroded in 2011 as the farm land is likely to become an essential resource in combating the world food shortages predicted in projections based on climate change and population increases.

Settlement separation of particular concern to Mickle Trafford relates to Chester, Ellesmere Port, Mickle Trafford and Guilden Sutton.

- c. Question 9 ~ There should be a general reluctance to concede relaxations on developments for employment or to maintain the viability of a village which may appear to be desirable. However if exceptionally, such development are essential for the local economy, they should be limited to infill sites in order to prevent urban sprawl.
- d. Question 15 ~ the provision of traveller and gypsy sites must ensure even distribution around towns within the borough in order to prevent any one village from being swamped by incursions into the Green Belt. It is recognised that travellers wish to be near to population centres where they can tout for work but in view of the high rate of immigration from Ireland and Eastern Europe, the concept that sites must be placed on traditional travelling routes appears to be fallacious. The desirability of any site is subject to commercial pressure like any other employment opportunity.

The procedure for the development of traveller's sites must adhere to planning law if the general population are to be seen to be treated fairly and in order to prevent resentment against unfair discrimination leading to undesirable action.

## **8) IMAGE AND TOURISM**

This topic paper does not adequately cover the potential for greater exploitation of an extensive canal network within the borough which includes the Anderton Lift and access to the spectacular Llangollen canal.

## **9) EMPLOYMENT**

- a. Question 10 ~ No attempt should be made to control the type of business being developed as increasing controls are likely to act as a deterrent. Many areas have found that business genres tend to gravitate together in order to develop close commercial links and benefit from cross fertilisation of ideas.
- b. Question 13 ~ There is no pressing need at present.

## **10) DESIGN AND HERITAGE**

Question 4 ~ Taxpayers money should not be used to fund Public Art. Some of the Key Issue descriptions are a little obscure. The use of plain words is essential for effective communication and most importantly, consultation.

- a. Question 7 ~ Village Design Statements reflecting local views should drive a bottom up approach to planning or there will be no real or perceived value in carrying out the extensive local consultation necessary for their development.
- b. Question 12 ~ Recent revelations on the relative size and standards applying to both affordable and private housing should trigger a review of minimum standards to be applied to both housing types which should be similar and not penalise those standing on their own two feet. Public art simply increases the cost to the taxpayer unnecessarily and often offends more people than it pleases. Art should not therefore be included in developing affordable housing but landscaping should.
- c. Question 13 ~ The provision of public art should not be a strategic issue and should not be included in planning obligations.

## **11) COMMUNITY FACILITIES**

- a. Question 5 ~ Key issues should seek to achieve a balance between granny annexes, sheltered housing and care homes in each significant settlement.
- b. Question 6 ~ The questionnaire included in Settlement Hierarchy assumes that any existing community facility is adequate to meet local requirements. The draft questionnaire should be designed to identify inadequate facilities e.g. the Village Hall in Mickle Trafford was built at a time when the population was at barely a quarter of the present level.
- c. Question 9 ~ The Local Development Framework should encourage the provision of adequate local facilities such as a Community and Activity Centres along with the development of support networks such as the Older People's Network. Community and Activity Centres should provide facilities for all ages such as bowls, tennis, table tennis, bridge and other indoor activities etc.
- d. Question 10 ~ Community centres should also provide facilities for youth club activities such as table tennis, pool etc. To encourage maximum use community facilities should be accessible via safe (separate) cycle ways so far as reasonably practicable.

## **12) CLIMATE CHANGE**

- a. Question 6 ~ Government targets are already set ambitiously high and it will therefore be far more productive for CWaC to seek to encourage progress by advising on cost effective ways of meeting these targets and ensuring that the recommended technology uses carbon reduction techniques which are beneficial in the short to medium term.
- b. Question 7 ~ CWaC should not seek to set targets for decentralised, renewable or low carbon energy since controlling the provision to the grid is likely to become difficult and costly.

## **13) CHESTER**

- a. Question 6 ~ Reducing the number of traffic lights and road signs has proven to effectively reduce congestion and improve safety in several towns. This approach has the potential to offer cost effective improvements on the present systems.
- b. Question 7 ~ the encouragement of sustainable travel will require existing time tables to be extended to provide early and late public transport for work and leisure. Consideration should also be given to texting information to users advising of any late changes such as the cancellation of a bus or train.
- c. Question 14 ~ Separation of settlements should remain permanent as evidence can always be biased to justifying building over the Green Belt.

- d. Question 15 ~ Whilst the Zoo may fulfil the requirements of a Strategic Site, expansion should be limited to the core Zoological activities. Development of the Zoo should not include the provision of hotels as it is likely to adversely affect the viability of existing hotels and guest houses which are already experiencing difficulties.