

A summary of Cheshire East Council's

Local Plan

Community Assembly

August 2026



Executive Summary

Introduction

On 18 August 2026, Cheshire East Council held its first Local Plan Community Assembly at Congleton Town Hall.

The event brought together 29 residents from across Cheshire East to discuss the borough's future and explore priorities for the new Local Plan.

The Community Assembly forms part of an ongoing programme of engagement supporting the preparation of Cheshire East's new Local Plan.

This report should be read alongside [this short Local Plan Community Assembly video](#), produced following the event, which provides a visual summary of the discussions and activity undertaken.

What residents told us

Throughout the event, participants demonstrated a strong attachment to the things that make Cheshire East distinctive. Discussions repeatedly returned to the importance of protecting the borough's countryside, natural environment, Green Belt, Green Gaps, towns, villages and local identity.

At the same time, participants recognised the need for future growth. Rather than opposing growth outright, attendees consistently emphasised that growth should be carefully planned, accompanied by infrastructure and services, and designed to improve the quality of life of existing and future residents.

A number of themes emerged repeatedly throughout discussions, including housing affordability, environmental protection, transport connectivity, infrastructure provision, town centre regeneration and community wellbeing.

Most important issues facing Cheshire East

The following table summarises the issues that participants most frequently prioritised during the ranking exercise.

Theme	Total
Natural environment	11
Housing & affordability	9
Town centres	5
Jobs & economy	4
Infrastructure	4
Transport & connectivity	3

The Natural Environment and Housing & Affordability emerged as the two highest-ranked themes overall, indicating strong concern for both environmental protection and housing provision within Cheshire East.

Key findings

Residents value Cheshire East's environment

Protection of the countryside, Green Belt, Green Gaps, biodiversity and landscape character emerged as one of the strongest and most consistent messages from the Community Assembly.

Participants repeatedly identified the natural environment as one of Cheshire East's greatest strengths and expressed a strong desire for future development to respect and protect these assets.

Growth should be infrastructure-led

A recurring concern throughout the event was that infrastructure and services are struggling to keep pace with development.

Participants highlighted pressures on schools, healthcare services, roads, utilities and public transport, and felt that future growth should be accompanied by appropriate investment in supporting infrastructure.

Housing affordability remains a significant concern

Housing affordability emerged as one of the most consistently prioritised issues across the event.

Participants highlighted the need for affordable housing, social housing and housing that responds to local needs, whilst also expressing concern about the impact of development on existing communities and infrastructure.

Transport and connectivity matter

Transport featured prominently throughout discussions.

Participants supported improvements to public transport, rail services, active travel infrastructure and connectivity between settlements. Many attendees viewed improved transport links as essential to both economic growth and quality of life.

Communities and local identity are important

Participants placed considerable value on community cohesion, local identity and thriving town centres.

There was a strong desire to ensure that future growth does not erode the individual character of Cheshire East's towns, villages and communities.

Brownfield development attracted strong support

Many participants expressed support for making greater use of brownfield land, vacant buildings and regeneration opportunities before considering development on greenfield land.

What participants want Cheshire East to look like in 2045

The future visioning exercise asked participants to imagine what a successful Cheshire East would look like in 2045.

Theme	Mentions
Environment, Countryside & Heritage	23
Transport & Connectivity	23
Town Centres, Regeneration & Placemaking	15
Housing & Development	12

Economy, Employment & Prosperity	12
Communities, Identity & Quality of Life	11
Public Services & Infrastructure	8

The exercise suggests that residents want a future Cheshire East that accommodates growth while protecting the qualities that make the borough distinctive. Improved public transport, thriving town centres, strong communities, environmental protection and local employment opportunities all featured strongly within participants' aspirations.

Growth scenarios

Participants considered five alternative approaches to future growth.

The Economic Corridor scenario received the highest overall level of support, while Rail Corridor Growth attracted the highest number of second-choice votes.

Urban Concentration, Rail Corridor Growth, New Settlement(s) and Economic Corridor all attracted meaningful support, suggesting that participants did not favour a single dominant approach.

Dispersed Growth received the lowest level of support overall.

Conclusions

A strong foundation for future engagement

The first Local Plan Community Assembly successfully brought together a diverse group of residents from across Cheshire East, with 29 of the 30 recruited participants attending the event.

The Assembly generated a substantial volume of feedback covering a wide range of issues, opportunities and aspirations. While views often differed on the detail, a number of recurring themes emerged consistently throughout discussions.

Growth is accepted, but conditions apply

One of the clearest conclusions from the event is that participants generally did not oppose growth in principle.

Instead, attendees consistently emphasised the importance of ensuring that growth is carefully planned, infrastructure-led and responsive to local circumstances. There was also widespread support for making greater use of brownfield land and regeneration opportunities alongside protecting valued countryside, green spaces and community assets.

Different groups bring different perspectives

The table-based approach provided a useful opportunity to explore how views varied between different groups of residents.

While there was broad agreement on a number of core issues, differences could also be observed between participant groups. This suggests that attitudes towards future development may vary across sections of the population and would benefit from further exploration during future stages of engagement.

More work is needed on growth options

The growth scenario exercise provided an initial indication of participant preferences regarding possible approaches to development.

However, no clear consensus emerged and support was distributed across several options. Additional work will therefore be required to refine growth scenarios and ensure they reflect the priorities identified during the Community Assembly before testing them further.

Qualitative findings should be tested further

As with all qualitative engagement, the findings should be regarded as providing depth of understanding rather than statistically representative results.

The Community Assembly has provided a valuable starting point for understanding resident views and priorities, but there would be merit in complementing these findings with a larger-scale quantitative survey. This would help test the themes identified through the Assembly and determine the extent to which they are shared by the wider population.

The conversation is only just beginning

The Community Assembly should be viewed as the beginning rather than the end of the conversation.

The findings from this event will help inform future engagement activities, including the next Local Plan Community Assembly later in 2026. Together, these activities will help build a stronger evidence base and provide greater clarity on resident priorities.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Community Assembly

A Local Plan Community Assembly was held on 18 August 2026 at Congleton Town Hall as part of the early stages of preparing Cheshire East's new Local Plan.

The event brought together a diverse group of residents from across the borough to explore the challenges facing Cheshire East, and to consider how the borough should develop over the coming years, through a series of facilitated discussions and activities.

This was the first in a planned series of Community Assemblies supporting the development of Cheshire East's new Local Plan.

Participant recruitment and attendance

Participants were recruited through a multi-stage process designed to achieve a balanced mix of residents from different backgrounds and circumstances, including different age groups, geographic areas, housing circumstances and levels of familiarity with planning.

Recruitment was primarily undertaken through [the council's Community Voices Panel](#), a panel of residents who have expressed an interest in participating in consultation and engagement activities. A targeted recruitment campaign was also undertaken through social media to broaden participation and attract residents who were not already members of the Community Voices Panel.

As a thank you for their time and contribution, attendees who took part in the Community Assembly received a £60 One4all gift card.

A total of 29 residents attended the Community Assembly.

Format of the Community Assembly

The Community Assembly combined short presentations with a series of facilitated table activities. Participants worked through discussion, brainstorming, mapping and voting exercises designed to explore key issues

facing Cheshire East and potential priorities for the new Local Plan. Each table was supported by a trained facilitator, with additional council officers available where required. Outputs from the activities were captured using post-it notes, flipcharts and voting exercises, and were subsequently analysed to inform this report.

Reading this report

This report summarises the discussions, activities and outputs from the Community Assembly.

The main body of the report provides a summary of the activities undertaken during the event and the findings that emerged from participant discussions.

Additional information is provided within the appendices:

- Appendix 1 – Video and photographs from the Community Assembly
- Appendix 2 – Attendee demographic profile
- Appendix 3 – Event agenda
- Appendix 4 – “Results on a page” document.

The report is intended to provide a transparent summary of discussions during the event. The findings presented should not be interpreted as representing the views of all Cheshire East residents, but rather the views expressed by those who participated in the Community Assembly.

Where appropriate, participant comments have been grouped into themes to aid analysis and interpretation.

Where in Cheshire East matters most

Activity purpose

The first activity was an “icebreaker” session – A short introductory exercise designed to help participants feel comfortable, get to know one another, and begin engaging with the topic of discussion.

Participants were asked “where in Cheshire East matters most to you and why?”, with responses captured on post-it notes.

Key themes emerging from the activity

The activity revealed a strong attachment to Cheshire East's natural environment, towns and villages, community facilities and places associated with everyday life.

Green spaces and countryside locations were by far the most common type of response, although participants also highlighted the importance of community assets, employment locations, educational institutions and transport infrastructure.

Although participants identified a wide range of locations, most responses fell within a number of recurring themes which are summarised below. The numbers shown in brackets indicate how many participant responses were grouped within each theme.

Green spaces, countryside and nature (21 mentions)

This was by far the most common theme across all tables.

Responses included general references to:

- Woodland, hedgerows and open spaces
- Nature and outdoor spaces
- Parks
- Allotments
- Green spaces generally
- The Green Belt

- Beautiful views that can be accessed from many locations across the borough.

Participants also identified a number of specific locations:

- Alderley Edge National Trust
- Bickerton
- Danes Moss / Penninstone Lane
- Green gap between Crewe and Haslington
- Hare Hill National Trust garden
- Lindow area
- Macclesfield Forest
- Middlewood Way
- Queens Park
- Teggs Nose
- The edge (Alderley edge)
- Victoria Park.

Town centres, villages and settlements (12 mentions)

A number of responses highlighted the importance of towns, villages and local identity. Responses included general references to:

- Town centres
- The mix of rural and urban areas.

Specific locations included:

- Alsager
- Bollington Village
- Congleton
- Crewe
- Macclesfield (specifically the market square)
- Poynton
- Sandbach
- Wybunbury

Home, garden and belonging (4 mentions)

Several participants identified their home as the place that mattered most to them. Responses included references to:

- Home
- Crewe (home)
- Alsager (home)
- My garden.

Community facilities, culture and social assets (4 mentions)

Participants also identified a range of places that support community life, culture and recreation. Responses included:

- Libraries
- Community spaces
- Quiet spaces
- Event venues
- St Mary's Church, Nantwich
- The Button Warehouse.

Education, health, employment and community assets (4 mentions)

Participants identified a number of locations that support learning, health, employment, innovation and community development.

Responses included:

- Reaseheath College and University
- Alderley Park
- Macclesfield District General Hospital and Hospice
- Fallibroome Academy
- Scouts and Guides.

Infrastructure and connectivity (1 mention)

One participant identified transport infrastructure as particularly important, highlighting the role of the M6 in enabling access to other parts of the borough and beyond.

SWOT analysis – Strengths

Activity purpose

The second activity was a SWOT analysis from a planning perspective within Cheshire East.

A SWOT assessment is a structured exercise used to identify the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats associated with a place, organisation or issue, helping participants understand what is working well, what is under pressure, and what future opportunities and risks may need to be addressed.

Assessment feedback was captured by table facilitators on flipcharts.

This section of the report summarises the “strengths” identified during the SWOT analysis.

Key themes emerging from the activity

The strengths discussion highlighted a strong appreciation for Cheshire East's natural environment, economy, communities, connectivity and strategic location.

Environmental assets were the most frequently identified strength, although participants also highlighted the borough's economic opportunities, quality of life, transport links and strong sense of community.

Environmental assets and countryside (13 mentions)

Responses included:

- Open, beautiful and varied countryside
- Proximity to the Peak District National Park
- Nature
- Green space
- Landscape, ecology and heritage
- Countryside (Peak District and Cheshire Plain)
- Agricultural industries and productive farmland
- Allotments

- Places for exercise and walking
- Public rights of way
- Public footpath network.

Communities, identity and quality of life (9 mentions)

Responses included:

- Community events
- Community involvement
- Community and neighbourhoods
- Distinct identities of towns
- Quality of life
- People
- Facilities for children
- Places for people to meet together
- Cost of living attracting younger people and families.

Location, connectivity and accessibility (7 mentions)

Responses included:

- Proximity to Manchester
- Proximity to cities
- Manchester Airport
- Rail connections
- Motorway network
- Strategic location
- Connectivity
- New cycle lanes in Crewe.

Economy, employment and innovation (6 mentions)

Responses included:

- Life sciences and R&D jobs
- Alderley Park
- Prestige industries
- High-value employment
- New jobs in the area

- High economic output
- Technical schools supporting careers.

Planning, growth and housing (4 mentions)

Responses included:

- Bentley planning decision
- Appropriate planning refusals
- Planning to protect and enhance
- More permissive housing and development policies increasing housing supply.

Social infrastructure and public facilities (3 mentions)

Responses included:

- New youth centre in Crewe
- Play areas.

SWOT analysis – Weaknesses

This section of the report summarises the “weaknesses” identified during the SWOT analysis.

Key themes emerging from the activity

The weaknesses discussion focused heavily on infrastructure, public services, transport and concerns about how growth is being planned and delivered across Cheshire East.

Participants frequently identified pressure on schools, healthcare, roads and other infrastructure, together with concerns about the responsiveness of the planning system, the availability of public transport and the ability of public services to keep pace with development.

Infrastructure and public services (12 mentions)

Responses included:

- Insufficient schools
- Schools already at capacity
- Doctors and dentists under pressure
- Lack of services
- Social infrastructure under pressure
- Escalating social care
- Infrastructure needed to support growth
- Services not expanding at the same rate as housebuilding
- Electricity distribution constraints
- Energy infrastructure concerns
- Community facilities for young people not present.

Transport and connectivity (11 mentions)

Responses included:

- Public transport links
- Bus services
- Insufficient public transport

- Dominance of cars
- Road safety
- Connectivity issues
- Safe travel to and from school
- Pressure on the road network
- Parking becoming harder and more expensive
- Transport links and rail connectivity.

Planning, growth and development management (8 mentions)

Responses included:

- Planning system not sufficiently responsive to residents
- Planning becoming reactive
- Lack of a joined-up plan
- Slow rate of planning permissions holding up infrastructure
- Bentley planning timing issues
- Relationship between the Local Plan and Spatial Development Strategy
- Historic absence of an up-to-date plan
- Public unable to see evidence gathered to date.

Council capacity, governance and delivery (5 mentions)

Responses included:

- Churn in Cheshire East Council management
- Pressure on Cheshire East Council budgets
- Willingness and ability of the Council to make changes
- Difficulty contacting services
- Limitations in communication channels.

Brownfield land and regeneration (3 mentions)

Responses included:

- Underused brownfield land
- Poor use of brownfield sites
- Vacant sites being exploited by developers.

Environment and loss of green space (3 mentions)

Responses included:

- Reduction in green spaces and natural areas
- Green spaces being eroded
- Flooding impacts associated with development.

Town centres and local identity (3 mentions)

Responses included:

- Erosion of local identity
- Liveliness of town centres
- Shops closing in town centres.

Economy and employment (1 mention)

Responses included:

- Employment concerns
- Lack of employment opportunities.

SWOT analysis – Opportunities

This section of the report summarises the “opportunities” identified during the SWOT analysis.

Key themes emerging from the activity

The opportunities discussion focused on how Cheshire East could make better use of existing assets, particularly brownfield land, town centres, transport connectivity, community infrastructure and clean energy.

Participants also identified opportunities to improve housing affordability, support economic growth, strengthen community engagement and make greater use of the borough's strategic location.

Brownfield land, regeneration and reuse (6 mentions)

Responses included:

- Active brownfield site surveying
- Greater use of brownfield sites to reduce pressure on the Green Belt
- Brownfield development
- Reuse of empty properties
- Reuse of abandoned buildings
- Town centre regeneration
- Converting flats above shops into residential accommodation.

Clean energy and environmental sustainability (6 mentions)

Responses included:

- Renewable energy generation
- Policies requiring greater energy efficiency
- Energy storage
- Reducing energy costs
- Harnessing green energy through self-powered housing
- Clean energy
- Electric vehicles
- Electric buses

- Electric taxis.

Community facilities and community development (5 mentions)

Responses included:

- Community Citizens' Assembly
- Cohesive communities and shared spaces
- Facilities for young people
- Places for children
- Community parks and play areas
- More communal spaces
- More community events.

Transport and infrastructure investment (4 mentions)

Responses included:

- Better coordination of roadworks
- Maximising existing transport links
- Better public transport
- Investment in infrastructure funded by development
- Leighton Hospital expansion.

Economy, employment and investment (4 mentions)

Responses included:

- Tourism
- Job creation for young people
- Supporting local talent
- Relocation of industry
- Challenging stereotypes and promoting life sciences sectors.

Housing and affordability (4 mentions)

Responses included:

- More social housing
- More affordable housing

- Smaller housing developments
- Different housing types
- Population growth linked to lower rents and house prices.

Planning, engagement and strategic growth (4 mentions)

Responses included:

- Stronger Local Plan engagement
- Long-term planning to 2045
- Resisting dominance of major housebuilders
- Ensuring development is planned coherently
- Avoiding uncontrolled expansion between settlements.

SWOT analysis – Threats

This section of the report summarises the “threats” identified during the SWOT analysis.

Key themes emerging from the activity

The threats discussion focused heavily on the potential impacts of development and growth, environmental pressures, infrastructure capacity, economic change and the ability of planning and public services to respond effectively to future challenges.

Participants frequently identified concerns relating to climate change, the loss of green space and local identity, pressure from housing development, infrastructure and service capacity, and the risk of planning decisions being driven by external factors rather than local priorities.

Planning, development and growth pressures (13 mentions)

Responses included:

- Planning led by developers in the absence of a five-year housing land supply
- Continual weakening of the planning system
- Mixed messages from Cheshire East Council
- Pressure for housing
- Scale of development
- Overdevelopment
- Struggling services in the face of new housing developments
- Development of green spaces without proper analysis of countryside impacts
- Building on Maw Green Lane
- Challenges preserving what people value
- Community involvement not influencing outcomes
- Tick-box consultation activity.

Environment, climate change and loss of green space (10 mentions)

Responses included:

- Climate change
- Loss of green space
- Erosion of landscape and green gaps
- Environmental impacts including flooding, habitat loss and fire risk
- Development on flood plains
- Food security through loss of farmland
- Loss of high-quality farmland
- Water security.

Communities, identity and town centres (9 mentions)

Responses included:

- Loss of identity
- Erosion of community identity
- Identity of communities and parishes
- Losing key community members
- Public dissatisfaction
- Smaller high streets disappearing
- Commercialisation of town centres.

Infrastructure, public services and transport (6 mentions)

Responses included:

- Struggling services
- Public transport provision
- Education capacity
- Traffic volume
- Public sector investment constraints
- Infrastructure unable to keep pace with growth.

Economy, employment and industry (5 mentions)

Responses included:

- Declining manufacturing
- Loss of employment
- Losing good jobs
- Declining industry
- Driving young people away from the area.

Governance, policy and public finances (5 mentions)

Responses included:

- Rapid regulatory change
- Meddling national government
- Budget pressures
- Lack of funding for investment.

Heritage and historic assets (2 mentions)

Responses included:

- Building on potential historic sites
- Risks to archaeological assets
- Impacts on medieval farmland and Roman heritage.

Crime and community safety (1 mention)

Responses included:

- Crime.

Identifying key issues

Activity purpose

The third activity was a brainstorming activity, where participants answered the question “what are the key issues facing Cheshire East?”.

Participants were asked to write their answers on post-it notes, and to then post their issues under one of 9 listed themes on a flipchart.

The listed themes provided were:

- Climate change
- Community and equality
- Health and wellbeing
- Housing & affordability
- Infrastructure
- Jobs & economy
- Natural environment
- Town centres
- Transport & connectivity.

This section of the report summarises the issues listed by attendees under each of these themes.

Climate change (14 mentions)

The discussion focused on the environmental and societal impacts of climate change, including biodiversity loss, green space protection, resilience to extreme weather events and the need to support the transition to a lower-carbon future.

Key issues raised

- Renewable energy generation and whether existing infrastructure can support it
- Reducing development on greenfield land
- Increasing pollution levels
- Access to water and long-term water security

- Wildfire risk and emergency preparedness
- Declining biodiversity
- Need for more natural and wildlife-rich green spaces
- Loss of green spaces through development
- Improving the energy efficiency of homes
- Climate change as a major global challenge with local implications
- Relationship between climate change, the environment and public health
- Economic impacts of climate change, including affordability and employment
- The increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather events, including heatwaves
- The need to recognise climate change and nature recovery as central considerations in future planning and development.

Community and equality (15 mentions)

The discussion focused on community cohesion, social inclusion, local identity and ensuring that people from different backgrounds and communities feel connected, represented and supported within Cheshire East.

Key issues raised

- Community safety and feeling safe
- Antisocial behaviour and crime
- Relationships between new and existing communities
- Celebrating diversity through festivals and community events
- Rising costs associated with social services
- Perceived dilution of smaller communities
- Closure of pubs and other community assets
- Need to strengthen local relationships and community connections
- Protecting the identity of towns, villages and parishes
- Social isolation among older people
- Co-production and involving communities in decision-making
- Supporting hidden disabilities and harder-to-reach groups
- Ensuring all communities have a voice in local decision-making
- Perceptions that some areas receive less investment or attention than others
- Need for additional community spaces, particularly for younger people

- Ensuring community activities and events are supported and not discouraged by costs or barriers.

Health and wellbeing (17 mentions)

The discussion focused on access to healthcare services, the needs of an ageing population, the importance of green spaces and community facilities, and the role of health and wellbeing in shaping future communities.

Key issues raised

- Ageing population and the implications for future service provision
- Access to GPs, dentists, nurses and other healthcare services
- Pressure on hospitals, including Leighton Hospital
- Need for additional healthcare facilities, including walk-in and community health centres
- Public transport and physical access to healthcare services
- Access to local centres and facilities for families and communities
- Provision of leisure centres and incentives to support healthy lifestyles
- Lack of sports clubs and recreational facilities
- Importance of community spaces in supporting wellbeing
- Mental health impacts associated with changing landscapes and loss of green space
- Importance of green spaces for physical and mental wellbeing
- Availability of allotments and opportunities to grow food locally
- Need for additional parks, allotments and outdoor spaces
- Desire for confidence that local issues will be addressed through future planning
- Ability for residents to remain within their communities and settle locally over the long term.

Housing & affordability (23 mentions)

The discussion focused primarily on housing affordability, the delivery of social housing, the location of future development, and ensuring that housing growth is supported by appropriate infrastructure and services.

Key issues raised

- Lack of affordable housing for local residents, younger people and families
- Need for additional social housing
- Housing values increasingly exceeding affordability
- Ensuring housing provision responds to population needs
- Pressure from large-scale housing development
- Concerns regarding development on greenfield and Green Belt land
- Greater use of brownfield land and previously developed sites
- Conversion of suitable commercial and industrial land to housing
- Need for stronger master-planning of towns and service centres
- Review of existing land allocations and safeguarded sites
- Housing growth not being matched by schools, healthcare and other infrastructure
- Need to build communities rather than standalone housing estates
- Importance of maintaining a robust planning framework while the new Local Plan is being prepared.

Infrastructure (16 mentions)

The discussion focused on the capacity and condition of infrastructure and public services, with concerns that roads, utilities and essential services are struggling to keep pace with population growth and new development.

Key issues raised

- Cheshire East Council's budget deficit and its impact on infrastructure investment
- Water infrastructure, supply and future capacity
- Energy infrastructure, including grid connections, energy storage and network capacity
- General maintenance of highways and public spaces
- Existing road networks under increasing pressure
- Road congestion and longer journey times
- Poor road quality and maintenance
- Perception that roads cannot cope with current levels of development

- Need to ensure infrastructure keeps pace with new housing and development
- Insufficient provision of primary and secondary schools
- Pressure on public services arising from growth and inadequate planning
- Access to doctors, dentists and healthcare services
- Insufficient bus services
- Disjointed infrastructure planning, including isolated bus stops without supporting footways
- Lack of supporting infrastructure and services alongside new housing development, including healthcare, schools, transport and parking provision.

Jobs & economy (9 mentions)

The discussion focused on employment opportunities, supporting local businesses and innovation, ensuring access to jobs, and creating an economy that benefits communities across Cheshire East.

Key issues raised

- Future economic growth and where development should be focused
- Supporting start-ups, innovation and scientific/business parks
- Building on successful initiatives such as UTC grant schemes
- Ensuring economic benefits are felt across all communities
- Availability of jobs within local areas, including the declining availability of well-paid jobs
- Locating businesses closer to communities
- Recruiting more local people within the Council
- Rising cost of living
- Improving public transport links to employment destinations beyond major cities.

Natural environment (15 mentions)

The discussion focused on protecting Cheshire East's natural environment, Green Belt, countryside and biodiversity, alongside concerns about the impact of development on green spaces, habitats and landscape character.

Key issues raised

- Protecting the Green Belt from development pressures
- Protecting natural sites in the face of national development requirements
- Reduction in greenfield sites and development of green spaces
- Loss of green spaces and countryside
- Loss of habitats and biodiversity
- Development pressure on high-quality Green Belt farmland
- Protecting landscape character and valued local environments
- Concerns regarding the purpose and effectiveness of designated Green Gaps
- Managing the environmental impacts of overdevelopment
- Improving the visibility, accessibility and safety of Public Rights of Way (PROW)
- Protecting and promoting industrial heritage, canals and green spaces
- Fly-tipping and waste management issues
- Extraction licensing, monitoring and biodiversity impacts
- Incorporating green infrastructure into new developments
- Importance of accessible green spaces for health and wellbeing.

Town centres (19 mentions)

The discussion focused on the future role of town centres, concerns about declining high streets, and opportunities to improve vitality, accessibility and investment in local centres.

Key issues raised

- Changing role and function of town centres and high streets
- Impact of out-of-town retail and development on town centre viability
- Need for a clear vision and long-term strategy for town centres
- Investment in town centres, particularly in Crewe
- Empty shops and vacant units within town centres
- Brownfield redevelopment opportunities within town centres
- Business rates and incentives to encourage businesses to locate and remain in town centres
- Loss of local shops and services

- Supporting a wider mix of town centre uses, including leisure, hospitality and entertainment
- Improving access to town centres through public transport
- Poor transport links between key destinations, including Crewe Railway Station and Leighton Hospital
- Cost and availability of parking
- Free or lower-cost public transport to support town centre visits
- Encouraging greater use of electric vehicles within town centres
- Recognition of town centres as the heart of local communities
- Town centre developments and improvements designed to attract more visitors.

Transport & connectivity (18 mentions)

The discussion focused on the quality, reliability and accessibility of transport infrastructure, with particular concerns around public transport provision, congestion, road capacity and the ability to travel sustainably across Cheshire East.

Key issues raised

- Desire to increase active travel, but limitations created by existing road layouts
- Opportunities to develop quiet lanes, greenways and active travel routes
- Traffic growth linked to new development and perceived lack of supporting road improvements
- Strong north-south rail connectivity, but weaker east-west transport links
- Poor public transport connections between some destinations
- Reliability of bus services and bus timetables
- Need for incentives to encourage bus and rail use
- Lack of parking provision
- Traffic congestion
- Insufficient bus services
- Road maintenance and road repair issues
- Public transport provision generally
- Walkability of towns and communities
- Dependence on private cars
- Need for road improvements

- Difficulties experienced by non-drivers in accessing shops, healthcare, places of worship and other services.

Ranking key themes

Activity purpose

In the fourth activity participants were asked to identify the themes they felt were most important for the future of Cheshire East, from the list of themes provided. Participants discussed the themes and selected their first, second and third priorities.

Activity results

The table below summarises how participants prioritised the themes discussed during the Community Assembly. The counts show the number of times each theme was selected as a first, second or third priority.

To provide an overall indication of the relative importance attached to each theme, a weighted score has been calculated, with first-priority rankings assigned 3 points, second-priority rankings assigned 2 points, and third-priority rankings assigned 1 point. The total score has therefore been calculated as: (Count of Ranked 1 × 3) + (Count of Ranked 2 × 2) + (Count of Ranked 3 × 1).

As some discussion groups recorded tied rankings and not all groups completed a full ranking exercise, the results should be interpreted as providing an indication of participant priorities rather than a precise overall ranking.

Theme	Ranked 1 (count)	Ranked 2 (count)	Ranked 3 (count)	Total
Natural environment	2	2	1	11
Housing & affordability	3	0	0	9
Town centres	1	1	0	5
Jobs & economy	1	0	1	4
Infrastructure	0	2	0	4
Transport & connectivity	0	0	3	3
Climate change	0	1	0	2
Community and equality	0	0	1	1
Health and wellbeing	0	0	0	0

Key themes arising from the activity

- The Natural Environment received the highest overall level of support, indicating that environmental protection was one of the most consistently prioritised issues across the Community Assembly
- Housing & Affordability attracted the highest number of first-choice rankings, suggesting that it was viewed by many participants as the single most important issue facing Cheshire East
- Town Centres, Jobs & Economy and Infrastructure also received notable levels of support, highlighting the importance participants placed on the vitality of local places, economic prosperity and supporting infrastructure
- Transport & Connectivity was frequently identified as a third priority, reinforcing the importance of transport issues across the event

Overall, the results suggest that participants placed greatest importance on the environment, housing affordability, town centres, economic prosperity and infrastructure when considering the future of Cheshire East.

Future visioning

Activity purpose

The fifth activity was a mapping activity.

Participants were asked “it’s 2045 and the Local Plan has been successful – what is Cheshire East like?”, with answers being written on post-it notes and added to a large map on the tables (see appendix 1 for photos of this activity).

Key themes emerging from the activity

The future visioning exercise focused on what Cheshire East should look like in 2045 if the Local Plan is successful.

Across all tables, participants described a future characterised by protected countryside and green spaces, thriving and distinctive towns, improved transport and connectivity, stronger local communities, well-planned housing growth and a prosperous local economy.

A recurring theme was the desire to accommodate growth while retaining the characteristics that participants value most about Cheshire East, including its countryside, Green Belt, local identities and heritage assets.

Although participants described a wide range of aspirations for Cheshire East in 2045, most responses fell within a number of recurring themes which are summarised below.

Environment, countryside and heritage (23 mentions)

Responses included:

- Protection of the Green Belt and Green Gaps
- Retention of open countryside and natural environments
- Protection of habitats, peatlands, ancient woodland, wetlands and grasslands
- Increased provision of green spaces and allotments
- Protection of rural character and prevention of settlement merger
- Protection and celebration of industrial and local heritage

- Collaboration with the Peak District National Park
- Preserving areas in their existing form where appropriate.

Transport and connectivity (23 mentions)

Responses included:

- Improved public transport services
- Integrated transport systems
- Better bus services, including evening services
- Improved rail connections within Cheshire East and beyond
- Better access to railway stations
- Improved road infrastructure and junction improvements
- Active travel and safer cycling
- Easier movement across the borough
- Reduced traffic congestion
- Better connectivity to Manchester and other economic centres.

Town centres, regeneration and placemaking (15 mentions)

Responses included:

- Thriving town centres
- Revitalised and regenerated town centres
- Vibrant high streets
- Enhanced cultural, leisure and entertainment opportunities
- Regeneration of Crewe town centre
- Conversion of brownfield land and previously developed sites
- Development focused within existing urban areas
- Walkable town centres and neighbourhoods
- Improved links between key destinations and town centres.

Housing and development (12 mentions)

Responses included:

- Efficient and environmentally friendly housing
- Higher-density development in appropriate locations
- Housing linked to employment opportunities
- Avoiding urban sprawl

- Prevention of ribbon development and settlement merger
- Building at a pace communities can accommodate
- Better balance between housing and jobs
- More town-centre living.

Economy, employment and prosperity (12 mentions)

Responses included:

- High-tech industries and innovation hubs
- Strong local employment opportunities
- Local jobs for local people
- Mixed employment opportunities
- Scientific and research sectors
- Prosperity across Cheshire East
- Tourism growth
- Strong business and town centre economies.

Communities, identity and quality of life (11 mentions)

Responses included:

- Strong sense of community
- Cohesive communities
- Equality and inclusion
- Protection of local identities
- Towns retaining their individual character
- Community spaces and activity centres
- Facilities for young people
- Low crime and cleaner places
- Liveable towns and neighbourhoods.

Public services and infrastructure (8 mentions)

Responses included:

- Fully functioning and adequately funded public services
- Improved healthcare provision
- Additional hospitals and healthcare facilities
- Improved social infrastructure

- Better access to healthcare through transport improvements
- Infrastructure keeping pace with growth and development.

Growth scenarios

Activity purpose

The final activity explored a series of alternative growth scenarios for Cheshire East, bearing in mind the discussions held up to this point.

Participants were presented with five potential growth approaches, which set out different ways that future housing growth might be distributed across the borough.

The exercise was designed to explore resident preferences regarding different approaches to accommodating future growth.

Participants were asked to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each scenario before selecting their preferred and second-preferred options.

Whilst multiple growth scenarios will be considered as part of the local plan process, five potential scenarios were considered during the exercise, building on the previous discussions. They were:

1. Urban Concentration

A “towns first” approach, with approximately 75% of new housing directed to the borough's major towns and 25% distributed elsewhere.

2. Rail Corridor Growth

A “transport-led” approach, with approximately 65% of housing focused within rail catchment areas and 35% distributed elsewhere.

3. New Settlement(s)

A “new communities” approach, with 40-60% of housing accommodated within one or more new settlements, supported by new infrastructure, employment opportunities and services, with the remainder distributed elsewhere.

4. Economic Corridor

A “jobs-led growth” approach, with approximately 70% of housing delivered close to major employment hubs and 30% distributed elsewhere.

5. Dispersed Growth

A “balanced distribution” approach, with housing growth spread more evenly across settlements throughout the borough.

Activity results

The table below summarises participant preferences regarding the five growth scenarios considered during the Community Assembly. The counts show the number of times each scenario was selected as a first choice or second choice.

To provide an overall indication of support for each scenario, a weighted score has been calculated, with first-choice selections assigned 2 points and second-choice selections assigned 1 point. The total score has therefore been calculated as: (Count of 1st Choices × 2) + (Count of 2nd Choices × 1).

As with the wider Community Assembly findings, the results should be interpreted as providing an indication of participant preferences rather than a definitive view of Cheshire East residents as a whole.

Growth scenario	Counts of 1st choices	Counts of 2nd choices	Total
Economic Corridor	8	4	20
Urban Concentration	7	4	18
New Settlement(s)	6	6	18
Rail Corridor Growth	5	7	17
Dispersed Growth	4	3	11
Total	22	20	64

Key themes arising from the activity

- Economic Corridor received the highest overall score, suggesting that participants were particularly supportive of an approach that aligns housing growth with major employment locations

- Urban Concentration and New Settlement(s) received the second-highest overall scores, indicating substantial support for both a town-focused approach and the creation of new communities supported by infrastructure and services
- Rail Corridor Growth received the highest number of second-choice selections, suggesting that transport-led growth was broadly acceptable to many participants, even where it was not their preferred option
- Dispersed Growth attracted the lowest level of overall support, indicating less appetite for distributing development more evenly across settlements throughout the borough.

Overall, the results suggest that participants generally favoured growth approaches linked to existing towns, employment opportunities and supporting infrastructure, rather than a more dispersed distribution of development across the borough.

Conclusions

A strong foundation for future engagement

The first Local Plan Community Assembly successfully brought together a diverse group of residents from across Cheshire East, with 29 of the 30 recruited participants attending the event.

The Assembly generated a substantial volume of feedback covering a wide range of issues, opportunities and aspirations. While views often differed on the detail, a number of recurring themes emerged consistently throughout discussions.

Growth is accepted, but conditions apply

One of the clearest conclusions from the event is that participants generally did not oppose growth in principle.

Instead, attendees consistently emphasised the importance of ensuring that growth is carefully planned, infrastructure-led and responsive to local circumstances. There was also widespread support for making greater use of brownfield land and regeneration opportunities alongside protecting valued countryside, green spaces and community assets.

Different groups bring different perspectives

The table-based approach provided a useful opportunity to explore how views varied between different groups of residents.

While there was broad agreement on a number of core issues, differences could also be observed between participant groups. This suggests that attitudes towards future development may vary across sections of the population and would benefit from further exploration during future stages of engagement.

More work is needed on growth options

The growth scenario exercise provided an initial indication of participant preferences regarding possible approaches to development.

However, no clear consensus emerged and support was distributed across several options. Additional work will therefore be required to refine growth scenarios and ensure they reflect the priorities identified during the Community Assembly before testing them further.

Qualitative findings should be tested further

As with all qualitative engagement, the findings should be regarded as providing depth of understanding rather than statistically representative results.

The Community Assembly has provided a valuable starting point for understanding resident views and priorities, but there would be merit in complementing these findings with a larger-scale quantitative survey. This would help test the themes identified through the Assembly and determine the extent to which they are shared by the wider population.

The conversation is only just beginning

The Community Assembly should be viewed as the beginning rather than the end of the conversation.

The findings from this event will help inform future engagement activities, including the next Local Plan Community Assembly later in 2026. Together, these activities will help build a stronger evidence base and provide greater clarity on resident priorities.

Appendix 1 – Event video and photos

The following video and photographs were captured during the Local Plan Community Assembly. The video and photographs are included to illustrate the event and the activities undertaken by participants.

All individuals shown in this video and photographs provided consent for Cheshire East Council to use the footage and photographs in which they appear for communications, reporting and promotional purposes. Participants also acknowledged Cheshire East Council's use of their information for the administration of the event.

Every reasonable effort has been made to ensure that only individuals who provided consent are included in the video and photographs contained within this report.

Event video

A short video summarising the Community Assembly can be viewed here:

[Cheshire East Council's first Local Plan Community Assembly - Video](#)

Photo 1: The Deputy Leader of the council welcomes everyone to the event



Photo 2: The council's Head of Planning introduces the table activities



Photo 3: Participants take part in the mapping exercise #1



Photo 4: Participants take part in the mapping exercise #2



Photo 5: Participants take part in table exercises #1



Photo 6: Participants take part in table exercises #2



Photo 7: Participants take part in table exercises #3



Photo 8: Participants take part in table exercises #4



Photo 9: Participants take part in table exercises #5



Photo 10: Congleton Town Hall entrance



Appendix 2 – About attendees

This appendix provides demographic information about Community Assembly attendees. Completion of demographic questions was optional and therefore respondent counts vary between questions.

Summary of attendees

Of the 29 attendees:

- 59% were male, 41% female
- 28% were aged under 45, 34% were aged 45-64, 38% were aged 65 or older
- 93% identified as White British and 7% identified with another ethnic group
- 30% lived in the “North” of the borough, 30% lived in the “Centre” of the borough, 41% lived in the “South” of the borough
- 76% owned their home, 24% were not homeowners, including either renters or in social housing
- 41% were employed or self-employed, 41% were retired, 17% had other occupations, including looking after the home and being unemployed
- 31% were familiar with council planning and the local plan, 45% were somewhat familiar, 24% were unfamiliar.

Detailed attendee breakdown

The following is a detailed breakdown of the 29 Local Plan Community Assembly attendees.

Sex

59% were male, 41% female.

Which of the following best describes you?	Count	Percent
Male	17	59%
Female	12	41%
Total	29	

Age

28% were aged under 45, 34% were aged 45-64, 38% were aged 65 or older.

What age group do you belong to?	Count	Percent
25-34	3	10%
35-44	5	17%
45-54	6	21%
55-64	4	14%
65-74	7	24%
75-84	4	14%
Total	29	

Ethnicity

93% were "White British", 7% were in other ethnic groups.

What is your ethnic group?	Count	Percent
White British	27	93%
Other ethnic group	2	7%
Total	29	

Home locations

30% lived in the "North" of the borough, 30% lived in the "Centre" of the borough, 41% lived in the "South" of the borough.

Home location of attendees:	Count	Percent
North Cheshire East	8	30%
Central Cheshire East	8	30%
South Cheshire East	11	41%
Total	27	

Housing tenure

76% owned their home, 24% were not homeowners, including either renters or in social housing.

Which of the following best describes your current housing situation?	Count	Percent
Own (outright or on a mortgage)	22	76%
Other (inc. private renter and social housing)	7	24%
Total	29	

Occupation

41% were employed or self-employed, 41% were retired, 17% had other occupations including looking after the home and being unemployed.

Which of the following best describes your current employment situation?	Count	Percent
Employed or self-employed	12	41%
Retired	12	41%
Other (inc. looking after the home and unemployed)	5	17%
Total	29	

Familiarity with planning

31% were familiar with council planning and the local plan, 45% were somewhat familiar, 24% were unfamiliar.

How familiar are you with council planning or the Local Plan?	Count	Percent
Familiar	9	31%
Somewhat familiar	13	45%
Not familiar	7	24%
Total	29	

Appendix 3 – Event agenda

Congleton Town Hall, 18 August 2026

16:45 – Arrival and registration

17:00 – Welcome (Deputy Leader of the council)

17:05 – Housekeeping and agenda

17:10 – Table activity: Icebreaker

Participants to introduce themselves and answer the question “Where in Cheshire East matters most to you and why?”.

17:20 – Table activity: SWOT analysis

Conduct a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Opportunities, Weaknesses, Threats) from a planning perspective within Cheshire East. What’s working well? What feels under pressure or changing?

17:35 – Identifying Key Issues and Plan Focus

Brainstorming – What are the key issues facing Cheshire East?

Rank the top 3 themes in Cheshire East from the following: Housing & affordability; Jobs & economy; Transport & connectivity; Natural environment; Climate change; Town centres; Health and wellbeing; Infrastructure; & Community and equality.

18:00 – Future Visioning

Participants to answer the question: 'It’s 2045 and the Local Plan has been successful – what is Cheshire East like'?

Answers to be added to a large map on the table.

18:25 – Growth Scenarios

Participants to discuss and vote for which of the 5 growth scenarios is there preferred one from: 1. Urban concentration; 2. Rail corridor growth; 3. New settlements; 4. Economic corridor; and 5. Dispersed growth.

18:50 – Wrap-Up, Next Steps and Close

Appendix 4 – Results on a Page

The following "Results on a Page" document has been produced to provide a concise summary of the key findings from the Community Assembly.

Cheshire East Council's

Local Plan Community Assembly #1

Results On A Page See full results at <https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/consultations>

Assembly date: 18 August 2026

Location: Congleton Town Hall

Attendees:

- 1 x Deputy Leader of the council
- 29 x Cheshire East residents
- 2 x council main facilitators
- 6 x council table facilitators





Conclusions

- This Assembly provided a strong foundation for future engagement
- Growth is accepted by attendees, but conditions apply
- Different groups of people bring different perspectives
- More work is needed on growth options for the borough
- Qualitative Assembly findings should be tested further
- The conversation is only just beginning



Key findings

- Residents value Cheshire East's environment
- Growth should be infrastructure-led
- Housing affordability remains a major concern
- Transport and connectivity matter
- Communities and local identity are important
- Brownfield development attracted strong support



Research and Consultation, Cheshire East Council, August 2026

