

MATTER 10 – RURAL ISSUES

The LPS, Part 1, acknowledged the rural nature of the Cheshire East Borough. Part 2 policies and site allocations must be rural-proofed to best protect and enhance the high grade farmland, distinctive rural landscape character and ecology of the area.

Policy RUR 1 New buildings for agriculture and forestry (Policy RUR 1)

Answer to 156. CPRE agrees it is important for the Local Plan to support both a prosperous rural economy and to protect and enhance open countryside. It is possible to do both with a clear policy stating development should be justified, and sensitive in scale, with styles, materials, etc that are sympathetic to the receiving environment. If not, development should be refused to ensure the local rural landscape character is protected. We are concerned about ‘development by the back door’ when barns are converted to dwellings via permitted development rights, and then soon afterwards a further barn is sought. This may be appropriate if the original building is no longer fit for purpose, but it is different if landowners aspire to develop small settlements at farmsteads. We urge for the right balance of providing for new farming and forestry requirements yet protecting the Cheshire East visitor economy, which relies on its appealing rural character.

Farm diversification (Policy RUR 2)

Answer to 157. CPRE is supportive of farm diversification understanding the difficulties associated with maintaining a living from agriculture, however it is concerned that any development must respect the countryside characteristics, such as tranquillity, landscape character and visual amenity, otherwise there would be a negative impact to rural character and on other farm diversification, including tourism accommodation businesses. We agree that retail should be limited in scale as not to detract from identified Key Service Centres.

Agricultural and forestry workers dwellings (Policy RUR 3)

Answer to 158. CPRE supports Policy RUR 3 and believes it to be consistent with NPPF paragraphs 78 to 80

Answer to 159. Policy RUR 3 should ensure agricultural workers have a decent habitable room space standard and adequate bathroom facilities to ensure rural workers dwellings afford a healthy living environment. We should not allow rural workers to be treated unfairly in terms of their standard of accommodation.

Essential rural worker occupancy conditions (Policy RUR 4)

Answer to 160. Much of Cheshire East has become very affluent, well out of reach of average wages. Those on low wages suffer from insecurity of housing due to an insufficient supply of affordable housing. We disagree with the Government’s too narrow definition of affordable homes, as market housing at 80% of

market value is well out of reach of most essential rural workers. We also think the Right to Buy should be scrapped in rural places as it has eroded the affordable housing stock to the detriment of planning balanced communities. For more information see: [Redefining Affordability - a CPRE Briefing - CPRE](#). CPRE is supportive of the aim of Policy RUR 4 to ensure adequate provision of affordable housing for local needs in perpetuity.

Best and most versatile agricultural land (Policy RUR 5)

Answer to 161. Without question, Cheshire East is a valuable food-producing area with a significant agricultural economy. It continues to be under significant development pressure due to the land values that can be attracted with consent for development, and consequently the protection of best and most versatile agricultural land is important for the Borough, both now and in the future.

In our response to an earlier Local Plan consultation, we referred to research by the Natural Capital Impact Group. A key conclusion from analysis of a range of scenarios on land use is that there is a very significant risk that the additional demands on UK agricultural land might not be met through land released from identified supply side initiatives. A land shortfall of approx. 6 million hectares could occur, equivalent to a third of current UK agricultural land. In effect this means a precautionary approach to our best and most versatile should be taken. https://www.cisl.cam.ac.uk/system/files/documents/natural-capital-leaders-platform-the-best-use-of-u_0.pdf Grades 1 and 2 should be prohibited from all development in our view, as it is scarce and is a national asset. CPRE considers Policy RUR 5 consistent with national policy and the LPS in recognising the benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land.

Outdoor sport, leisure and recreation outside of settlement boundaries (Policy RUR 6)

Answer to 162. The level of activity to be generated from outdoor sport, leisure and recreation ought to be a consideration, as the local road network may be unable to cope with it. We are pleased to see night-lighting specifically referenced as it causes light pollution and is worth mentioning in the Policy, as we think people ought to be able to see the stars in a rural area. In addition, noise should be specifically referred to in Policy RUR 6 as activity and increased traffic can spoil tranquillity, which is an essential characteristic of rural places. With such minor amendment, Policy RUR 6 would provide an effective and consistent with national policy and the LPS in defining the circumstances in which development for outdoor sport, recreation and leisure will be permitted outside of settlement boundaries.

Equestrian development outside of settlement boundaries (Policy RUR 7)

Answer to 163. CPRE is supportive of Policy RUR 7 and considers it to be positively prepared and consistent with national policy in supporting equestrian development as part of a prosperous rural economy. Requirements to make best use of existing buildings seems to encourage a sustainable approach and limit additional buildings to small scale non-commercial proposals or to facilitate the growth of existing businesses is similar to Policy RUR1, which seeks to balance both a prosperous rural economy and protect and enhance open countryside. We would encourage the use of temporary materials, to avoid landowners having expectations managed. New equestrian facilities should not be seen as a route to a dwelling house or other permanent structure.

Visitor accommodation outside of settlement boundaries (Policy RUR 8)

Answer to 164. CPRE objects to the deletion of ‘small-scale’ as this may lead to ‘large scale’ proposals for visitor accommodation outside of settlement boundaries and it will lead to problems of unrestrained development in rural places. We are concerned the policy will fail to conserve the intrinsic beauty and character of the countryside. The scale of additional buildings should be kept to a minimum level justified.

Caravan and camping sites (Policy RUR 9)

Answer to 165. CPRE objects to the deletion of ‘small-scale’ as this may lead to ‘large scale’ proposals for caravan and camping sites in open countryside. It will reduce the ability of the decision makers to control unrestrained development in rural places. In our view Policy RUR 9 requires revision to be consistent with national policy and the LPS in supporting sites for touring caravans and camping within the open countryside.

Employment development in the open countryside (Policy RUR 10)

Answer to 166. As above, CPRE believes the inclusion of ‘small-scale’ and ‘certain types’ enables proper management of employment development in the open countryside.

Answer to 167. The Government’s easing of the planning system via Permitted Development Rights has significantly watered down the ability of local planning authorities to limit residential development in rural places. In our view Policy RUR 10 is justified in restricting additional or new employment buildings to the minimum level, and ensuring properties are not built for employment use with a long-term aspiration in achieving a residential property that command higher land values. This Policy manages landowner expectations. The policy intends to guard against gaming of the system to achieve housing in locations that the Local Plan via the democratically accountable process never intended.

Extensions and alterations to buildings outside of settlement boundaries (Policy RUR 11)

Answer to 168. An extension or alteration to a building in the Green Belt is covered by NPPF Paragraph 149. If the Council wishes to define disproportionate for open countryside then the Policy is justified, but the inclusion of ‘Exceptions to these thresholds may be acceptable,’ is likely to result in legal challenges if an application is refused on this ground.

Residential curtilages outside of settlement boundaries (Policy RUR 12)

Answer to 169. Policy RUR 12 is justified in acknowledging the value of Cheshire East’s rural and open character of the countryside and acknowledging that when people enclose land, creating new boundaries and introduce domestic uses and associated paraphernalia it can have a significant detrimental impact. CPRE notes that a material change of use of land in the Green Belt is inappropriate development where it harms openness or/and conflicts with any of the purposes of the Green Belt.

Replacement buildings outside of settlement boundaries (Policy RUR 13)

Answer to 170. Policy RUR 13 seeks to permit replacement buildings outside settlement buildings provided they are not materially larger or have a more significant impact on landscape character. CPRE is concerned about bullet 5 as the original building footprint should be the starting point, otherwise applicants can keep extending the building ad infinitum with little control by the planning team.

Re-use of rural buildings for residential use (Policy RUR 14)

Answer to 171. Policy RUR 14 is consistent with the LPS and national policy in only supporting the residential re-use of rural buildings in circumstances where the benefit outweighs the harm. We agree that conversion to residential accommodation should ensure a satisfactory living environment. Clearly the scale of any extension should be tightly controlled outside defined settlement boundaries.