

Cheshire East Council Local Plan Part 2

Poynton Town Council: SADPD examination

Matter 5 Town Centres and Retail

Boundaries to town, local and urban centres, and neighbourhood parades

Q 80 including point 5) Poynton

Are the boundaries for the principal town centres, town centres, local centres, local urban centres and neighbourhood parades, as proposed on the draft Policies Map, consistent with national policy aims for town centres, positively prepared and justified by proportionate evidence, and would they be effective in guiding development proposals for main town centre uses alongside the relevant policies in neighbourhood plans? In particular

Definition of the town centre area

The current district centre boundary of Poynton is defined in the Macclesfield Borough Local Plan 2004. The same boundary is also shown in the draft Poynton Town Strategy 2012 part of the work supporting the preparation of the Cheshire East Local Plan (July 2017).

Also, the shopping area in School Lane at its junction with Park Lane is defined as a local shopping centre in the Macclesfield Borough Local Plan (Policy S4 item 24 refers). Poynton was designated a town in 2009.

The current boundary derived from Poynton of the 1990's and is now outdated. A new boundary is considered appropriate in recognition of the changed status of Poynton as a town and also in recognition of its designation as a Key Service Centre within Cheshire East Borough as confirmed in the Local Plan strategy.

Furthermore, saved policies for the management and development of Poynton town centre are set out in the Macclesfield Borough Local Plan and retained for the time being in the Cheshire East Local Plan July 2017. However, the Cheshire East Site Allocations Development Plan Document would delete the Poynton centre specific policies. The bulk of these policies are still considered relevant and applicable to Poynton in the 2020's. A revised version of the Poynton Neighbourhood Plan may seek to reinstate these policies in due course if the SADPD in its present form is retained in this examination. It should be noted that the SADPD would delete all Saved policies from the Macclesfield Borough Local Plan. That plan including the Poynton town centre specific policies retains its status as a part of the Development Plan for the time being which includes decision making on planning applications by Cheshire East Council and Planning Inspectors.

Policy TCB1 of the Poynton Neighbourhood Plan

Definition of the town centre and need for a master plan

A revised boundary for Poynton town centre was proposed in the Neighbourhood Plan and supported and endorsed by the Plan examiner. The examiner's report is dated June 2019 and his report dealing with this matter can be found here:

<https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/pdf/planning/neighbourhood-plan/examinations-17-07-19/poynton-ndp-examiners-report.pdf>

The relevant sections of the Examiner's report are set out below:

Topic (d): Town Centre and Business (Policies TCB 1 – TCP 9)

4.78 Policy TCB 1 defines the extent of the town centre and proposes that the town centre area becomes the subject of a master plan. The policy includes a significant amount of text which is more properly included as justification in Appendix A. Policy TCB 2 describes the intention to produce a Design Guide for the town centre. Policy TCB 3 aims to retain a mixture of uses in the town centre. Policy TCB 4 describes an intention to identify land for community purposes, either within the town centre or with good access to it. Policy TCB 5 considers car parking in the town centre. Generally, all the policies have regard to national guidance for ensuring the vitality of town centres, 48 but I have raised specific issues with each of them below.

4.79 I shall recommend transferring the excessive amount of justification in Policy TCB 1 to Appendix A. In addition, I note that the map (PNP page 55) revises the current town centre boundary (PNP page 56), saved in the MBLP, extending it along Park Lane to the School Lane area. This is in complete contrast to the proposed town centre boundary shown in FD 39 (page 67), the evidence base document for the emerging SADPD, which would reduce the centre by the omission of six areas, mostly, but not wholly, back land behind shopping frontages.

4.80 I note the objection to the proposed boundary by CEC in the Regulation 16 consultation response, but the justification and evidence for Policy TCB 1 outlined in Appendix A indicates the expectation that the centre of Poynton will undergo increased pressure due to the additional housing allocated within and around the town. I consider that this expectation is entirely reasonable and fully endorse the policy aims in the Plan for the centre of Poynton. The proposed town centre boundary delineated in FD 39 correlates with the proposed primary and secondary shopping frontages within the current town centre boundary which, in my opinion, makes little provision for any potential for expansion.⁴⁹ The potential to expand is enabled by the proposed town centre boundary proposed in the Plan which retains the land for regeneration opportunities and enables expansion along Park Lane.

4.81 I believe that the town centre boundary proposed in the PNP will enable Poynton to continue to thrive and still retain the village character which I observed on my visit to the area and I shall not recommend a modification. I consider the policy generally conforms with Policy EG 5 of the CELPS, but I shall recommend altering the phrasing from "... allows for ..." to "... supports ..." in the penultimate sentence in order to create clarity for effective development management. The map on page 55 and Appendix B3: Map 7 should also be amended either by excluding the two sites allocated for housing or identifying them, together with the boundary, in the key. (PM50)

The wording for the made Poynton Neighbourhood policy TCB 1 is as follows:

A revised boundary for Poynton town centre is proposed in this Plan as shown below. (the plan is not shown as these statements are limited to text only) This boundary incorporates the local shopping centre at Park Lane/School Lane and also supports the following changes over the plan period:

- Requirements for public service buildings
- Car parking (see TCB 5)
- Extension of the Shared Space scheme
- Further improvements in linking the main shopping streets with School Lane and Queensway

Map of the made boundary

This Plan also proposes that the town centre area be the subject of a new Master Plan that takes into account the changes in capacity and functions of Poynton Town Centre over the period to 2030 (the Local Plan period). NB This work has yet to start due to the need to resolve the issue of the town centre boundary.

Q 80 Item f) Poynton: Inspector's question

Should the town centre boundary for Poynton be aligned with the boundary defined in the Poynton Neighbourhood Plan (PNP) or would the PNP boundary be superseded by the boundary proposed on the SADPD Policies Map once adopted? If not, and they are intended to operate alongside each other, is it evident how a decision maker should react to development proposals that are within the PNP town centre boundary, but not within the SADPD boundary, how the respective policies would operate in tandem? Where they are in conflict, which one would take precedence in accord with paragraph 30 of the NPPF?

For the reasons set out above, the Town Council strongly endorses the Neighbourhood Plan town centre boundary as endorsed by both the Examiner and the local community through the referendum held two years ago. Clearly, town centres everywhere have been impacted by lockdowns and the COVID virus over the last 18 months. For a growing town such as Poynton it is essential that clear town centre boundaries for decision making on Planning matters should reflect local community and business interests. This is particularly relevant at this time as the Poynton Relief Road is due to open in 2022 after a period of construction beginning in Autumn 2020. The construction and alignment of the by-pass has been long awaited over many decades.

The Inspector refers to paragraph 30 of NPPF 2021 which states

30. Once a neighbourhood plan has been brought into force, the policies it contains take precedence over existing non-strategic policies in a local plan covering the neighbourhood area, where they are in conflict; unless they are superseded by strategic or non-strategic policies that are adopted subsequently.

The making of the Poynton Neighbourhood Plan 2019 falls between the current non-strategic policies in the Saved policies of the Macclesfield Borough Local Plan 2004 and the non-strategic policies of the Site Allocations Plan 2022.

It should also be noted that Poynton town centre has a Shared Space Scheme arrangement allowing traffic, pedestrians and other users of the town centre to share the spaces. The Shared Space Scheme was completed in 2012 and has won awards. The regeneration scheme removed the then traffic lights and changed the road lay out for what was one of the busiest junctions in Cheshire. It regenerated the main shopping street, Park Lane, and reinstated Fountain Place as the historic centre of the town. The local community has engaged and integrated with the scheme. Further details can be found here:

https://www.poyntontowncouncil.gov.uk/Shared_Space_35342.aspx

The making of the Neighbourhood Plan and the Shared Space Scheme are examples of locally led projects which can and do bring a range of benefits to the town.

The Borough Council Poynton Settlement Report (ED 39) of August 2020 addresses the issue of boundaries of the town centre within the Retail section of the report. The main sections relevant to this matter are set out for Retail and leisure on pages 27 to 43 (paragraphs 5.19 to 5.33). The report does not refer to the important aspect of town life which is the Shared Space. The report has references to the Poynton Neighbourhood Plan, some of which are relevant to town centre boundaries.

It can be seen that the proposed boundaries for the Site Allocations Plan are different to those in the made Neighbourhood Plan.

NPPF 2021 at section 7 addresses the matter of Ensuring the Vitality of town centres.

At paragraph 86 it confirms that “Planning policies and decisions should support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking a positive approach to their growth, management and adaptation. Planning policies should: a) define a network and hierarchy of town centres and promote their long-term vitality and viability – by allowing them to grow and diversify in a way that can respond to rapid changes in the retail and leisure industries, allows a suitable mix of uses (including housing) and reflects their distinctive characters b) define the extent of town centres and primary shopping areas, and make clear the range of uses permitted in such locations, as part of a positive strategy for the future of each centre; et al.

The Town Council is satisfied that this recent change of the NPPF continues to reflect the Neighbourhood Plan in that planning policies at item b) define the extent of town centres are set out including the boundary set in the Neighbourhood Plan. This is confirmed in that town centres are “at the heart of local communities”. The other roles referred to are that defining the role of the primary shopping areas and making clear the range of uses permitted in such are properly a matter for the local Planning authority (Cheshire East Council).

Conclusion

The town centre of Poynton lies at the heart of the local community of nearly 15,000 people. The population will increase over the next decade to the end of the plan period in 2030 as the three major housing developments derived from the Local Plan Strategy 2017 land allocations take effect. As the town boundary has also been re-defined by the strategy, other development will likely comprise infill and brownfield development within the town envelope. The town centre is easily access from all direction routes into the centre with the Fountain Place acting as the central focus.

The Poynton Neighbourhood Plan received enthusiastic support from the local community leading to a very successful referendum in 2019. The proposed town centre boundary shown in the Plan sought to recognise the potential growth of the town in the short to medium term. In the last 18 months, many town centres have suffered as a result of the impact of lockdown and the COVID virus. The town centre remains at the heart of the town with the Shared Space scheme successfully operating now for nearly a decade.

Both the public referendum and the Plan Examiner were supportive of the town centre boundary as defined in the Neighbourhood Plan (policy TCB1 of the plan refers). The Town Council considers there are benefits arising from this boundary as the town grows and recovers from recent constrains which all towns have suffered. As one of the Key Service Centres within the hierarchy of Cheshire East Council centres, we are confident that the town can continue to contribute to the wider communities in the north of the Borough. Many residents from the surrounding communities undertake their shopping, business and other activities within the proposed town centre boundary.

The Town Council thanks the Planning Inspector and Programme Officer for their advice and support at the examination.