

Cheshire East Council Local Plan Part 2

The Roe-naissance Project SADPD examination

Matter 5 Town centres and retail

Statement by The Roe-naissance Project, Christ Church Macclesfield

Part 1 Response to the Inspector's questions.

Q 80. 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: Macclesfield: Is the exclusion of the properties to the west around Christ Church and in Roe Street and to the north of King Edward Street from the town centre boundary justified, based on the evidence in the Retail Study Update and the Macclesfield Settlement Report, and consistent with national policy in ensuring the vitality of town centres?

Assessment

Paragraph 86 items a) to f) of NPPF 2021 sets out the criteria which planning policies should require in order to ensure the vitality of town centres. We would draw particular attention to item f) which states as follows:

f) recognise that residential development often plays an important role in ensuring the vitality of centres and encourage residential development on appropriate sites.

We have set out in our previous statements for responding to the Site Allocations plan how residential uses within the Christ Church area can and do play a major role in ensuring the vitality of Macclesfield town centre. The Roe-naissance Project itself includes some volunteers who live in and around the town centre. Over the last decade the support of the local resident community and the wider Macclesfield residents have resulted in many events taking place within both the church itself and the church grounds which are the major open space area for this part of the town centre.

Some recent examples of these events (held both in the church and its grounds) would include:

Heritage Open Days in September

Greenfest event also September – as a celebration of the change of seasons

Macclesfield in October – 3 day musical event in the grounds with some well known acts

Light up Christ Church at Christmas – an annual celebration of a Georgian Christmas for volunteers and the local community

Events for 2022 are at the planning stage and will include a full programme over the year.

Such events bring not only the local community into the town centre but many visitors who come into the centre to attend events including those at Christ Church and the popular monthly Treacle Market held in the town centre square itself opposite the town hall and surrounding streets.

With regard to housing, there has been an increase in the amount of housing in and around the Christ Church area over the last 10-15 years. This includes refurbishment, newly built housing and changes of use; there is also interest from the development industry in adding to the supply of residential units locally as can be evidenced by recent planning applications.

Q 98 (Macclesfield town centre (Policy RET 11) In the light of the Council's answer to Initial Question 9, should the Character Areas for Macclesfield town centre be added to the Policies Map to ensure the geographical representation of Policy RET 11?

The Roe-naissance Project would support the addition of the Character Areas to the Policies Map for the town centre as set out in policy RET 11. There is one main land use substantially omitted from the Character Areas and that is the important area of housing which is confirmed at item f) of paragraph 86 NPPF 2021. We would request the re-instatement of this policy or a similar variation as set out in Saved Policy MTC 20 of the Macclesfield Borough Local Plan 2004.

The policy is:

MTC20 The revitalisation of the area for housing will be encouraged . Redevelopment of existing non-residential uses will only be permitted for housing . Further change of use will not be allowed.

Due to local geography and other factors, the western side of Churchill Way is relatively flat unlike many other parts of Macclesfield town centre. This means that those living in residential properties in the Christ Church area can access the main shopping areas easily and quickly on foot and cycle thereby helping to support sustainability and also taking advantage of the exercise on route.

99. Should the Grade II* listed Christ Church and its surrounding area be incorporated as a

character area into Policy RET 11 for Macclesfield town centre and its environs?

The Christ Church itself and its surrounding area can be viewed as the largest area of open space within Macclesfield town centre (identified in green on the interactive adopted policies map which includes the details of the town centre itself which include the Christ and surroundings). The link is below:

https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/planning/spatial-planning/saved_and_other_policies/macclesfield_local_plan/macclesfield_local_plan.aspx

The Roe-naissance Project has submitted substantial evidence previously to Cheshire East Council seeking to retain the current Saved policies and plans of the Saved Macclesfield Borough Local Plan 2004.

The policy is:

MTC21 The reuse of Christ Church for community and leisure uses purposes will normally be permitted.

Not only should that policy or a variation of it be retained, but the church and its grounds have become a major focus of a wide range of events within the town centre in the last 10 years following the formation of the Roe-naissance Project. The church is the main landmark on the west side of the town and visible from a wide range of views.

Here is the Historic England link to the Church

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1206916>

Here are some very recent examples of the community engagement with the Project

<https://www.facebook.com/theroenaissanceproject/>

Part 2 Background and context

in terms of soundness, policy RET 11 (Macclesfield town centre and environs/development areas), Figure 9.2 Macclesfield town centre and environs character areas and the amendments to the boundary of Macclesfield town centre set out in the latest version of SADPD do not meet the relevant soundness criteria as set out in paragraph 35 of NPPF 2019.

Our assessment is based on the following NPPF guidance:

a) Positively prepared – providing a strategy which, as a minimum, seeks to meet the area’s objectively assessed needs and is informed by agreements with other authorities, so that

unmet need from neighbouring areas is accommodated where it is practical to do so and is consistent with achieving sustainable development;

b) Justified – an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence;

c) Effective – deliverable over the plan period, and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic matters that have been dealt with rather than deferred, as evidenced by the statement of common ground; and

d) Consistent with national policy – enabling the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in this Framework and other statements of national planning policy, where relevant.

Paragraph 36 of NPPF 2021 confirms that these tests of soundness will be applied to non-strategic policies (which would include the policy RET11) in a proportionate way, taking into account the extent to which they are consistent with relevant strategic policies for the area.

Assessment

Positively prepared: The changes to the boundaries of the town centre and the removal of Saved policies for the Christ Church area set out in the Macclesfield Borough Local Plan (policies MTC19: Housing MTC20: Christ Church Housing Area and MTC21: Reuse of Christ Church) are inconsistent and incompatible with achieving sustainable development

In terms of the economic objective (paragraph 8 a) of NPPF 2021), the removal of the whole Christ Church area from the boundaries of Macclesfield town centre does not help to build a strong, responsive or competitive local economy to the west side of the town centre. There are many small businesses within this area as well as the community infrastructure provided by the many events held within Christ Church itself. Regeneration and new build has occurred in recent years confirming the economic benefits which would likely be reduced or lost under proposed SADPD policy RET11 and the accompanying maps for the town centre.

In terms of the social objective of paragraph 8 b) of NPPF 2021, again there has been recent improvements which have helped to support the strong, vibrant and healthy communities within the immediate Christ Church area and other adjoining communities. A range of homes has been provided within the Christ Church and adjoining areas to meet the needs of present and future generations. Significant improvements have been undertaken in terms of refurbishment of properties along with environmental and landscaping improvement works within the grounds of Christ Church. Work is planned including with both the Town Council and the Borough Council to make further improvements to the Christ Church area. This

work is actively supported by the Roe-naissance project members and the ChurchesConservation Trust who are the owners of the Church and part of the grounds. In this way, the aim is to create locally a well-designed and safe built environment, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being both inside the Church and in the grounds.

Christ Church and its grounds are a Grade II* listed building with a unique history linked to the town. Therefore, in meeting the environmental objective of paragraph 8 NPPF 2021 both the existing boundary of the town centre and the applicable Saved policies have made a substantial contribution to protecting and enhancing the natural, built and historic environment within the area having done so for more than 30 years (Town and Country Planning Act 1990 refers).

Justified: The accompanying documents supporting the SADPD do not in our view provide sufficient justification for the changes to the boundary of Macclesfield town centre including the removal of the Christ Church area and the removal of the relevant Saved Policies in the Macclesfield Borough Local Plan. The Christ Church area is also a Conservation Area designated by the then Macclesfield Borough Council in 1988. Although the status as a conservation area would remain under the proposed SADPD changes, the removal of the strong links between the church, its setting, other local heritage assets and the history of the area is not addressed in the material supporting the proposed amended boundary.

Paragraph 31 of NPPF 2021 confirms that “the preparation and review of all policies should be underpinned by relevant and up-to-date evidence. This should be adequate and proportionate, focused tightly on supporting and justifying the policies concerned, and take into account relevant market signals”. The justification we make for the retention of both the existing town centre boundary and the relevant Saved Policies is the major change and improvements of the local area carried out over recent decades, some of which the Borough Council itself has contributed to.

The main functions of the Saved policies are still applicable and indeed may be more applicable now due to the factors such as the limited amount of housing completed elsewhere in Macclesfield town centre over recent decades, the lack of commitment to the town centre by the major house building companies, COVID and various other related issues. The proposed removals do not constitute an appropriate strategy, do not take into account the reasonable alternatives (which would include the retention of the existing boundary and Christ Church area policies) and are not based on proportionate evidence.

Effective. The matters referred to in this representation are Macclesfield town centre specific and therefore are not based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic

matters or evidenced by the statement of common ground.

Consistent with national policy. The proposed changes to boundaries and omission of existing relevant Saved policies are not consistent with national policy and do not enable the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the relevant policies in the NPPF. We have set out in some detail in our previous representations our reasons for questioning the soundness of the SADPD in terms of its conflict with national policy (NPPF and NPPG).

Conclusion

For these reasons, the Roe-naissance Project requests that the boundary for Macclesfield town centre to the west of Churchill Way should be retained as that shown on the Macclesfield Borough Local Plan 2004 Proposals Map Inset Macclesfield Town Centre. Secondly, the Project requests that the following two Saved Policies of the Macclesfield Borough Local Plan be included or slightly revised to achieve the same effect within a revised policy RET 11;

these are set out on page 149 of the 2004 Macclesfield Borough Local Plan

Christ Church Housing area

MTC20 The revitalisation of the area for housing will be encouraged . Redevelopment of existing non-residential uses will only be permitted for housing . Further change of use will not be allowed.

and

MTC21 The reuse of Christ Church for community and leisure uses purposes will normally be permitted.

Our project would welcome the opportunity to take the Planning Inspector around the Christ Church area (including the grounds and inside the church itself) were he able to do so.

The Roe-naissance Project Macclesfield Christ Church

Macclesfield

September 2021