

Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan

Issues and Options (Regulation 18) Consultation

Prepared by Fisher German LLP on behalf of
Hooton Estate

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Contents

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Adopted Local Plan	2
	Spatial Strategy	2
	SS 1: Is there any reason for the council not to plan for delivering a minimum of 1,914 new homes each year?2	
	SS 2: Should the Council Consider a Stepped Housing Requirement with Lower Early Delivery?.....	3
	SS 4: Do You Agree with the Suggested Policy Approach Towards the Spatial Strategy Principles?.....	3
	SS 5: Do You Agree with the Suggested Policy Approach Towards the Settlement Hierarchy?	3
	SS 7: Do you think the new Local Plan should contain place-based policies for smaller settlements such as: Cuddington and Sandiway; Farndon; Helsby; Kelsall; Malpas; Tarporley; Tattenhall; and Tarvin?.....	3
	SS 8: Do you agree that in smaller settlements, the character should be protected, and development should not exceed the capacity of existing services and infrastructure?.....	4
	SS 11: Please select the option which is the most appropriate spatial strategy for Cheshire West and Chester:	4
3.	Representations	4
	Site One: Land at Church Street, Malpas	4
	Site specific comments to support Hooton Station Growth Options (Section 5.1).....	6
	SS 77 Which of the identified potential growth areas around Hooton station do you consider the most suitable?	6
	SS 78 Do you have any further comments about any of the potential growth areas identified around Hooton station?.....	6
	SS 79 Are there any constraints, including infrastructure provision, that should be considered for Hooton station when developing the new Local Plan?	6
4.	Other Policy Considerations	7
	HO 1: Do you agree with the suggested policy approach towards mix and type and specialist housing in new developments, as set out in HO 1 'Mix and type of housing in new developments and specialist housing' above? If not, please suggest how it could be amended?	7
	HO 2: Should the housing mix and type and specialist housing be delivered through a percentage policy approach that sets requirements for each category of housing?	7
5.	Assessment and Conclusion	7

1. Introduction

- 1.1. These representations have been prepared by Fisher German LLP on behalf of Hooton Estate, in respect of the Cheshire West and Chester Council's Issues and Options (Regulation 18) consultation and their land interests.
- 1.2. The site has been previously submitted to the Council during their most recent Call for Sites exercise carried out in 2024. The focus of these representations is to engage with the emerging plan and provide constructive input to aid its development.

2. Adopted Local Plan

- 2.1. The current review of Cheshire West and Chester local plan is welcomed, particularly considering the requirement under paragraph 33 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) to review plans at least every five years. This review provides a critical opportunity to evaluate the performance of the adopted plan against key planning objectives.
- 2.2. While the adopted Local Plan (Part One: Strategic Policies, 2015 and Part Two: Land Allocations and Detailed Policies, 2019) has provided a degree of policy certainty, it is increasingly apparent that aspects of the Plan are now dated. There are clear signs that the spatial strategy and some of the supporting policies may no longer be fully aligned with current national policy, particularly with regards to housing delivery and economic flexibility.
- 2.3. The current spatial strategy is overly reliant on a limited number of strategic allocations, many of which face complex infrastructure and viability challenges. This has introduced risk into the delivery trajectory and has limited the ability of the plan to respond flexibly to changing circumstances. A more diversified and deliverable land supply is now required, including a broader distribution of medium-sized sites, as encouraged by paragraph 69 of the NPPF.
- 2.4. A key part of the Local Plan review must be a reassessment of how housing delivery can better reflect the borough's diverse and evolving needs. Many existing allocations focus on uniform housing types, often at lower densities. Renewed emphasis is needed on mixed-use developments that integrate a variety of housing tenures, types, and price points alongside complementary commercial, or community uses. This approach supports social equity and fosters resilient, long-term communities.
- 2.5. Mixed-use developments that combine housing with commercial or community uses are often more deliverable and responsive to market demands. Allocations should prioritise well-located sites capable of supporting a balanced mix of residential tenures and compatible non-residential uses, enhancing vibrancy and economic vitality.
- 2.6. Delivering homes alongside employment and local services within walkable, mixed-use neighbourhoods enables reduced car dependency, strengthens local amenities, and aligns with the borough's environmental and placemaking ambitions.
- 2.7. In reviewing the spatial strategy, there is a critical opportunity to direct growth to those locations that can offer integrated housing delivery, combining, accessibility, and high design standards. This includes not only large-scale developments, but also medium-sized sites capable of early delivery and of delivering meaningful housing mix at a community scale.

Spatial Strategy

- 2.8. The overall aim to promote sustainable development across Cheshire West and Chester is strongly supported. The revised National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024) and updated Standard Method have significantly increased the borough's Local Housing Need, from around 374 to 865 dwellings per annum, necessitating additional residential allocations.
- 2.9. The Council's spatial options, particularly those promoting growth in sustainable, well-connected locations, provide a logical framework for meeting this demand. A clear strategy that aligns housing with employment opportunities, infrastructure, and transport accessibility will be essential to delivering a balanced and deliverable Local Plan.

SS 1: Is there any reason for the council not to plan for delivering a minimum of 1,914 new homes each year?

- 2.10. There is no reason the Council should not plan to deliver a minimum of 1,914 new homes each year. Planning for this level of growth is necessary to address affordability pressures, support economic development, and ensure a steady supply of housing land across the borough. A proactive response

will help maintain a five-year housing land supply and ensure the Local Plan is found sound at examination.

SS 2: Should the Council Consider a Stepped Housing Requirement with Lower Early Delivery?

- 2.11. Stepped housing may reflect practical delivery challenges, particularly in the early years, however it risks delaying the supply of much-needed homes in areas experiencing acute affordability pressures. Given the identified need and market signals, the Council should avoid under-delivery in the early plan period, instead supporting early phases of development in growth areas such in sustainable edge-of-settlement locations such as Hooton, where land is available, unconstrained, and capable of early delivery.
- 2.12. A stepped approach is typically adopted when there are significant changes in housing requirements, however this trajectory raises fundamental soundness issues. It can be a risky approach that would not deliver sufficient homes early enough to counter and can be arguably contrary to government policy to boost the supply of housing. It is instead worth identifying additional sources of housing delivery in the early years of the plan period.
- 2.13. The land off Chester Road, Hooton, is in single ownership and available for early delivery. Delaying allocation would risk underutilising a highly sustainable and strategically located site capable of contributing significantly to the early plan period.

SS 4: Do You Agree with the Suggested Policy Approach Towards the Spatial Strategy Principles?

- 2.14. The spatial principles present a broadly balanced approach, appropriately focusing growth in urban areas and key service centres. However, greater emphasis is needed on the deliverability of housing in strategic locations. The strategy should also offer clearer guidance on the timely delivery of supporting infrastructure, particularly around the northern edge of Hooton, where infrastructure, rail access, and the strategic highway network are already in place to support new homes.

SS 5: Do You Agree with the Suggested Policy Approach Towards the Settlement Hierarchy?

- 2.15. The current settlement hierarchy provides a useful framework for distributing growth, but consideration should be given to elevating the status of Hooton due to its unique location adjacent to Ellesmere Port, excellent rail connectivity, and access to the M53 and M56 corridors. It functions as a sustainable location for growth and is well-placed to support wider borough housing needs.
- 2.16. To ensure the plan responds to both local housing need and market demand in the northwest of the borough, the hierarchy should support planned housing allocations in sustainable, well-connected locations like Hooton. The site's location between Ellesmere Port and Bromborough, with direct access to public transport and strategic highways, makes it suitable for proportionate, landscape led, mixed-use residential development.

SS 7: Do you think the new Local Plan should contain place-based policies for smaller settlements such as: Cuddington and Sandiway; Farndon; Helsby; Kelsall; Malpas; Tarporley; Tattenhall; and Tarvin?

- 2.17. Yes, the Local Plan should include place-based policies for other sustainable settlements not currently identified but which serve strategic roles, including Hooton. Hooton's proximity to Ellesmere Port, strong public transport links, and role in providing access to employment hubs like Wirral and Liverpool merit the creation of a tailored policy approach.
- 2.18. Place-based policies can help guide appropriate levels of housing growth while also delivering wider community benefits such as open space, improved access to local facilities, and development that reflects local identity. As our client is a long-term landowner with a commitment to delivering community-focused outcomes, there is a unique opportunity at Hooton to provide new homes and mixed-use development that integrates well with existing infrastructure, supports biodiversity net gain, and enhances the settlement's function within the borough.

SS 8: Do you agree that in smaller settlements, the character should be protected, and development should not exceed the capacity of existing services and infrastructure?

- 2.19. It is agreed that the character of smaller settlements should be protected and that development must be appropriately phased alongside necessary infrastructure upgrades. However, this principle should not be interpreted as a barrier to delivering sustainable, plan-led growth in locations that offer clear opportunities to support the borough's strategic housing needs.
- 2.20. The Land at Chester Road, Hooton, represents an opportunity to accommodate high-quality, mixed-use residential development without compromising the existing settlement character. Its location adjacent to the built-up area of Ellesmere Port ensures strong connectivity and access to existing infrastructure and services. The Local Plan should facilitate this type of well-integrated development while requiring contributions to enhance local services, sustainable transport, and green infrastructure. This approach would allow areas like Hooton to grow in a way that is both respectful of local identity and responsive to borough-wide housing needs.

SS 11: Please select the option which is the most appropriate spatial strategy for Cheshire West and Chester:

- 2.21. Our preferred spatial strategy is Option B, which promotes a more balanced distribution of development across the borough, including in sustainable locations at the urban fringe of key settlements. The Land at Chester Road, Hooton, is ideally placed to contribute to this strategy, offering a deliverable, accessible, and landscape led mixed-use residential extension to Ellesmere Port that aligns with national and local policy objectives.
- 2.22. While Option A is supported in principle for its emphasis on brownfield regeneration, it is unlikely to meet the scale or variety of housing needs identified through the revised Standard Method, particularly in areas where greenfield sites can deliver early-phase growth supported by existing infrastructure. The Hooton site provides a realistic and timely opportunity to contribute to housing delivery without placing pressure on constrained urban land.
- 2.23. Option C is not supported, due to the risks associated with delivering large-scale new settlements and extensive Green Belt release. These approaches often face long lead-in times and significant infrastructure dependencies that undermine early delivery and contribute to housing shortfalls.
- 2.24. We recommend that the Council adopt Option B as the preferred spatial strategy, potentially supplemented by elements of Option A where appropriate. This hybrid model would support flexibility, ensure a robust five-year housing land supply, and enable sites like Chester Road, Hooton to be brought forward early in the plan period. The Hooton site is a logical extension of the settlement boundary and offers scope to deliver new homes, green infrastructure, mixed-use development, and community benefits in line with both local policy and the objectives of the revised NPPF.

3. Representations

Site One: Land at Chester Road, Elsmere Port

- 3.1. Section 5.1 of the Issues and Options consultation invites specific comments on proposed site allocations. This representation relates to land off Chester Road, Hooton, Ellesmere Port, hereafter referred to as "the site", submitted on behalf of the landowner, the Hooton Estate. The site has not previously been allocated but is now being promoted for consideration as part of a comprehensive, master planned mixed-use development opportunity.
- 3.2. The land comprises approximately 213.19 acres (86.27 hectares) of predominantly agricultural fields. The site is located off Chester Road, Ellesmere Port, adjacent to the Vauxhall Motor Sports Club to the west, with residential neighbourhoods beyond. It is bounded to the northeast by the M53 motorway.

- 3.3. The site is situated between the urban boundaries of Ellesmere Port and Bromborough, occupying a strategic, sustainable location in proximity to major transport infrastructure, including Hooton Railway Station (1 mile away). Its location provides a natural extension to the existing built environment and a unique opportunity to deliver growth in line with the borough’s spatial strategy.



Figure 1. Land at Chester Road, Ellesmere Port (2025).

- 3.4. The land is considered suitable, achievable, and available for development and is being actively promoted by the Hooton Estate. The site is largely free from major development constraints, aside from small, localised areas that fall within Flood Zones 2 and 3, which can be mitigated through sensitive design, including the integration of sustainable drainage systems (SuDS), wetland planting, and landscape-led solutions.
- 3.5. This site offers the potential for a comprehensive mixed-use development, delivering both residential and commercial elements. A strategic allocation of this scale would enable cohesive placemaking, integrating housing, green infrastructure, open space, and community facilities into a sustainable, balanced neighbourhood.
- 3.6. The site’s close access to employment, schools, services, and public transport supports sustainable, low-carbon living. Its allocation would deliver a high-quality, landscape-led mixed-use scheme reflecting Hooton’s character, creating a walkable neighbourhood connecting Bromborough and Hooton. The mixed-use plan would boost local jobs, provide green infrastructure, open space, BNG, and incorporate renewable energy and sustainable drainage for climate resilience.
- 3.7. The site presents a clear opportunity to deliver a gateway development, strengthening the settlement’s identity while contributing positively to its housing and economic supply. The scale and flexibility of the landholding allow for a phased approach to development, enabling early delivery of essential infrastructure, open space, and community benefits, while maintaining capacity to adapt to changing housing needs over the course of the plan period.

- 3.8. In summary, the Land off Chester Road, Ellesmere Port represents a well-located, sustainable, and deliverable site that aligns with both local planning policy and the objectives of the NPPF. Its allocation would make a meaningful contribution to meeting identified housing needs, provide a framework for the delivery of essential infrastructure and green space, support climate resilience and low-carbon living, and enable the creation of a vibrant mixed-use, inclusive neighbourhood that complements and strengthens the existing settlement pattern of Ellesmere Port.

Site specific comments to support Hooton Station Growth Options (Section 5.1)

SS 77 Which of the identified potential growth areas around Hooton station do you consider the most suitable?

- 3.9. While the current Local Plan consultation identifies potential growth areas HOO2, HOO3, and HOO4 near Hooton Station, the Land off Chester Road represents a highly suitable and strategic option that complements these sites. HOO3 is identified as a mixed-use area, and HOO2 and HOO4 are residential allocations; however, the Land off Chester Road offers a larger, contiguous parcel capable of delivering a high-quality, landscape-led residential-led mixed-use extension that supports and enhances these allocations. Its proximity to these growth areas and direct adjacency to Hooton Station provide excellent sustainable transport connectivity, making it an ideal location for delivering a walkable, well-integrated community.
- 3.10. Its size and position between Ellesmere Port and Bromborough offer a logical and deliverable opportunity to meet pressing housing needs within a well-integrated, walkable community. This site is uniquely capable of delivering a significant number of new homes, with the potential to exceed 2,500 dwellings based on typical residential densities, contributing meaningfully to the Council's housing targets while supporting local economic vitality through mixed-use development.

SS 78 Do you have any further comments about any of the potential growth areas identified around Hooton station?

- 3.11. The identified growth areas around Hooton Station, including HOO2, HOO3, and HOO4, offer positive opportunities for residential and mixed-use development; however, these options are limited in scale and do not fully capitalize on the potential of the Land off Chester Road. The site, owned by a single landowner (the Hooton Estate), is available and ready to deliver housing early in the plan period. Its omission from the growth options is therefore a missed opportunity to provide a comprehensive, phased development that aligns with the Council's spatial strategy prioritizing development near sustainable transport hubs and creates a cohesive neighbourhood alongside HOO2, HOO3, and HOO4.
- 3.12. Developing this site would align with national and local policy objectives for sustainable development, placemaking, and housing delivery. It would provide a well-designed, mixed-use neighbourhood that balances residential growth with green infrastructure, biodiversity net gain, and climate-resilient design principles. Moreover, it supports the regeneration and economic growth objectives for Ellesmere Port and complements recent housing approvals nearby, such as the 265-home development at Roften Works, demonstrating local demand and deliverability.

SS 79 Are there any constraints, including infrastructure provision, that should be considered for Hooton station when developing the new Local Plan?

- 3.13. The site off Chester Road is largely free from significant constraints, though parts lie within Flood Zones 2 and 3. These areas can be effectively managed through sustainable drainage systems (SuDS), permeable paving, and natural flood management techniques to reduce flood risk and enhance biodiversity. Infrastructure considerations will include ensuring adequate access and connectivity to the M53 and local roads, which can be addressed through developer contributions and coordinated infrastructure investment.

- 3.14. Hooton Station itself is well positioned to support increased passenger demand, providing excellent rail links to Liverpool, Chester, and beyond, thus underpinning the site's sustainable transport credentials. Any development would also include the delivery of local community infrastructure and green space, support both the existing community and new residents while aligning with Supplementary Planning Documents related to design quality, parking standards, and developer contributions.

4. Other Policy Considerations

HO 1: Do you agree with the suggested policy approach towards mix and type and specialist housing in new developments, as set out in HO 1 'Mix and type of housing in new developments and specialist housing' above? If not, please suggest how it could be amended?

- 4.1. The suggested policy approach towards housing mix, type, and specialist housing is broadly supported as it recognises the need for diverse, inclusive communities that meet varied demographic and social requirements.
- 4.2. However, flexibility should be embedded within the policy to respond to local market conditions and site-specific characteristics, particularly on larger strategic sites such as the land off Chester Road, Ellesmere Port. Provision for specialist housing should be carefully calibrated to meet demonstrated local needs without imposing inflexible percentage targets that could risk delivery.
- 4.3. The policy should also emphasise the integration of specialist housing within mainstream developments to promote social cohesion, accessibility, and sustainable communities.

HO 2: Should the housing mix and type and specialist housing be delivered through a percentage policy approach that sets requirements for each category of housing?

- 4.4. While percentage-based targets can offer clarity and help guide development in line with identified housing needs, a rigid or overly prescriptive approach may not be appropriate across all sites or settlement types. A more flexible framework is recommended, which sets indicative targets informed by the Cheshire West and Chester Housing Needs Assessment but allows for site-specific negotiation based on local needs, site constraints, and viability.
- 4.5. This approach would enable the Local Plan to respond more effectively to evolving demographic trends, local market conditions, and the unique characteristics of individual settlements, particularly at key growth areas like Ellesmere Port and its environs. The policy should encourage a balanced housing mix that reflects both borough-wide strategic objectives and local community aspirations.

5. Assessment and Conclusion

- 5.1. This representation supports a revised spatial strategy for Cheshire West and Chester that delivers a more balanced, responsive, and deliverable pattern of growth across the borough. The Council must plan positively to meet increased housing needs in line with the NPPF, with a focus on allocating sustainable, well-connected sites that can support mixed-use development and housing delivery at scale.
- 5.2. We support Spatial Option B as the most appropriate strategic approach. It promotes a sustainable distribution of growth without over-reliance on constrained brownfield urban areas or extensive Green Belt release. Within this framework, the land off Chester Road, near Hooton and Ellesmere Port, offers a logical and deliverable opportunity to accommodate a significant quantum of residential-led mixed-use development in a location with excellent infrastructure, sustainable transport links, and access to key employment centres.

- 5.3. This site extends to approximately 86.27 hectares (213 acres) and lies between the settlement boundaries of Ellesmere Port and Bromborough, directly adjacent to Hooton Station. It is a clear candidate for a strategic residential-led mixed-use allocation, capable of delivering a high-quality, master planned extension that includes a mix of housing types, green infrastructure, and potential for integrated commercial and community uses. The site's strong connectivity, by both rail and motorway, makes it ideally placed to contribute to the borough's growth objectives while reducing car dependency.
- 5.4. The land is available, achievable, and deliverable within the plan period. It is in single ownership and actively promoted for development, with a clear intent to bring forward a landscape-led scheme that meets borough-wide and local housing needs. The scale of the site allows for early and phased delivery, supporting five-year housing land supply requirements while aligning with the Local Plan's longer-term objectives.
- 5.5. The development of this site would enable the delivery of a well-designed, low-carbon neighbourhood incorporating sustainable drainage, biodiversity net gain, and climate-resilient landscaping. The scheme offers the opportunity to create a new gateway into Ellesmere Port that reflects best practice in placemaking and contributes positively to the borough's wider regeneration and environmental ambitions.
- 5.6. We encourage the Council to give full and positive consideration to the allocation of the Chester Road site within the new Local Plan as a key location for mixed-use development, including residential growth. Its strategic location, scale, and readiness for development make it ideally suited to support the borough's housing strategy and ensure the Plan is robust, sound, and responsive to local and national policy objectives.