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Planning, Community Engagement, Masterplanning and Urban Design, Heritage Conservation, Education, Skills and Training, Project Enabling, Regeneration Initiatives, Funding Applications, Third Sector Organisational Development, Strategic and Business Planning



Congleton Housing Needs Assessment July 2015



Congleton Housing Needs Assessment

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1. Executive Summary

Housing Target for the Civil Parish of Congleton

Congleton is a 'Key Service Centre' within the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy, though its designation is as a town, and not as a number of separate but connected Parishes. The latest objectively assessed housing need for Cheshire East indicates a need for 36,000 homes over the plan period, with recent spatial distribution work carried out by AECOM on behalf of Cheshire East Council indicating a requirement for Congleton (the town as a whole, and not the Civil Parish of Congleton) to deliver 4,150 of these new homes, a large proportion of which will be in adjoining Parishes (2,526: existing commitments and proposed Strategic Sites within the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy).

In terms of a housing target for the Civil Parish of Congleton, a figure of **1,624 homes** should be catered for within the Neighbourhood Plan (the new Local Plan target for Congleton as a town, less homes proposed within adjoining Parishes), the target being made up of:

- There are currently **1,053** homes with a permission of some form (and this includes recent completions and the like).
- A range of sites with the potential for **289** homes are proposed through the Cheshire East Local Plan.
- A balance of **282** homes.

Housing Need Related Issues

In summary, the key issues for Congleton Town Council to consider when developing housing related policies for the Neighbourhood Plan are as follows:

- Catering for the needs of an ageing population.
- Catering for the need and demands of younger people.
- Addressing affordability.
- Creating a modern housing offer.
- New delivery models where the market is not addressing key issues.
- Targeting sites in and around the town centre.

As well as developing policies to address these issues, the Town Council should also consider:

- Further work to understand how specific issues (e.g. how downsizing can be encouraged) can be addressed.
- Allocation of sites within the Neighbourhood Plan.

How they are able to enable delivery through working positively and proactively with Cheshire East Council.

2. Introduction

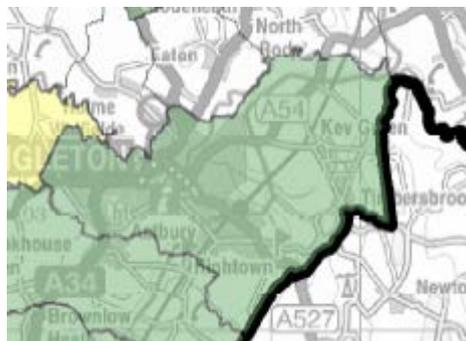
Introduction to Urban Vision Enterprise CIC

Urban Vision Enterprise is a town planning and regeneration professional consultancy, and a community interest company. Urban Vision specialises in planning and regeneration, neighbourhood planning and evidence base development, heritage-led regeneration and conservation, urban design, community engagement, third sector organisational development, training and education. Clients include the Department for Communities and Local Government, UK and national professional bodies and membership organisations, local authorities, town and parish councils, neighbourhood forums and local community groups.

The co-directors and associates of Urban Vision Enterprise CIC have a considerable body of experience in developing and delivering projects, Neighbourhood Planning and policy development, and a strong track record of successfully bidding for funding, both as consultants and in previous employed roles. Their collective experience includes developing and delivering tens of millions of pounds worth of projects over the past 15 years, including housing-led projects and initiatives. It includes developing projects and successful bids for funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Homes and Communities Agency, SRB6, English Heritage, CABE, ERDF, Advantage West Midlands, and the Arts Council.

Introduction to the Commission

The commission involves an assessment of housing needs across the Congleton Neighbourhood Area, which will form part of the Neighbourhood Plan evidence base, and will help shape the growth scenario on which policies will be formed. It is understood that the Neighbourhood Area is the Civil Parish of Congleton.



The Congleton Neighbourhood Area

Urban Vision Enterprise CIC is strongly suited to undertaking this commission and can deliver the outcomes sought by Congleton Town Council and Locality. As well as having extensive experience of policy development and planning expertise, Urban Vision is also at the forefront of the Localism agenda, developing Neighbourhood Plans in urban and rural areas, and community-led housing solutions, including the delivery of self and custom build projects in North Staffordshire. We also have a good understanding of the local housing market, and the strategic context to which the proposed Neighbourhood Plan must respond.

Aims and of the Congleton Housing Needs Assessment

The aims of the Housing Needs Assessment are:

- To identify evidence based housing needs of the Civil Parish of Congleton to 2030;

- To identify trends, influencers, and pressures that will shape identified housing need and demand;
- To identify where across the Civil Parish of Congleton those needs can be addressed; and
- To identify an agreed growth scenario that will underpin policy making for the Congleton Neighbourhood Plan.

The approach to the commission is as follows:

Stage 1: Review of Baseline Information

This would involve the review of key baseline data, including:

- 2011 Census;
- Local population data and demographics;
- Land Registry House Price Data;
- PRS Data (Supply and Rents);
- New OAN (Cheshire East Housing Development Study 2015);
- Cheshire East SHMA;
- Cheshire East Housing Strategy;
- Cheshire East SHLAA;
- Other relevant Local Plan Evidence;
- Local housebuilding data;
- Recent planning data (i.e. applications, approvals, completion rates, etc.);
- Market interest; and
- Subjective matters (for example image and perception, etc.)

This will lead to the development of a 'market and need profile'.

*It is considered that the size of the Neighbourhood Area and population would make the usual approach very difficult to achieve over a 7 week period. However, Cheshire East Council's Strategic Housing Team usually have very detailed information available that can be analysed as part of the Baseline Review.

Stage 2: Strategic Context

This would involve the review of:

- Sub-Regional and Local Economic Geography, and influence of Travel to Work patterns;
- Local Plan Development Strategy;
- Cheshire East Infrastructure Study;
- Cheshire East Economic Development Strategy;
- Local Regeneration Strategy; and
- Other relevant Local Plan Evidence.

The key findings will then be used alongside the market and need profile to develop a number of growth scenarios.

Stage 3: Development of Growth Scenarios

Utilising the findings of Stage 2 and the market profile, a number of growth scenarios will be modelled, using a number of different variables, for example:

- With HS2 in Crewe/without HS2 in Crewe and the knock-on effects for South Cheshire;
- Utilisation of policies of restraint; and
- Various economic growth scenarios, including major infrastructure investment.

From this a preferred growth scenario will be developed.

Stage 4: Preferred Growth Scenario

Stage 4 will see the development and establishment of the preferred growth scenario to underpin the Neighbourhood Plan.

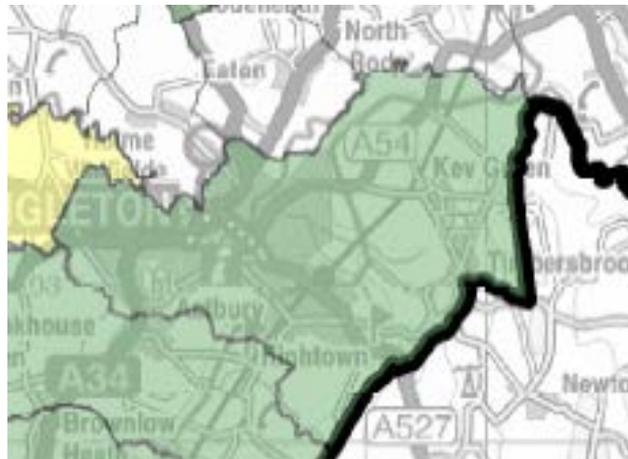
This scope of work assumes that the local authority will provide mapping data and support.

It also assumes for review and quality assurance by Urban Vision Enterprise.

3. Congleton: the Place

The Neighbourhood Area

The defined Neighbourhood Area for the purposes of the Neighbourhood Plan is the Civil Parish of Congleton (see plan below).



Plan 1: the Neighbourhood Area of the Civil Parish of Congleton

The Parish includes the whole of the urban area of Congleton, and stretches from the edge of Eaton and North Rode to the north, to the boundary with Staffordshire to the south and west, and Astbury, Hulme Walfield, and Somerford Booths to the west.

There are significant relationships with adjoining Parishes including Astbury and Hulme Walfield and Somerford Booths. Indeed, Congleton as most people know it includes areas which are located within neighbouring Parishes, and much of the growth planned within the Congleton area falls within these neighbouring Parishes.

This is considered in Strategic Context, below.

Strategic Context

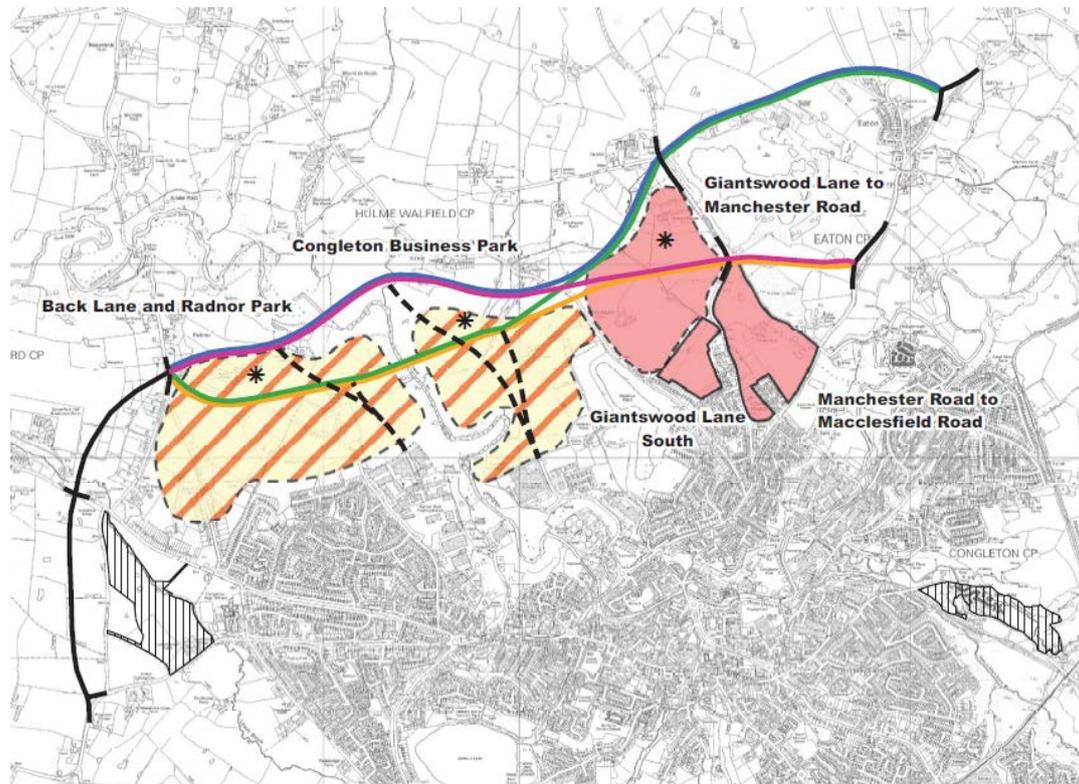
Cheshire East Local Plan

The current local planning policy framework for the Civil Parish is provided by the Local Plan of the former Borough of Congleton. However, it is important to consider these housing related issues in the context of the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy, which is currently at examination stage, although the examination has been suspended to allow a number of key issues to be addressed.

The Local Plan Strategy¹ provides a spatial interpretation of the key objective for the future of Cheshire East, which is “sustainable, jobs-led growth and sustainable vibrant communities”.

Through the new Local Plan, the Council intends to pursue a pro-growth strategy, with the recently updated objectively assessed need suggesting the delivery of 36,000 new homes by 2030 to support population growth and the creation of over 30,000 new jobs in the region. The Local Plan Strategy acknowledges the need to release sites from the Green Belt, though the main focus for development will be the Borough’s two principal towns – Crewe and Macclesfield. In addition, Key Service Centres – which includes Congleton – will also see significant development over the plan period. Together with

Crewe in the west, and Macclesfield to the east, the 'Planning for Growth' element of the Local Plan promotes Congleton as being part of a "corridor of opportunity".



Plan 2: Strategic Sites and Link Road 'Corridor of Interest' (from Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy – Submission Version) – the sites to the north fall within adjoining Parishes

The main implications for Congleton would be the delivery of 4,150 homes – up from 3,500 in the submission version of the plan – and 24ha of new employment land, to address Congleton’s relative shortage of jobs. In addition, it will also provide the framework for the delivery of the proposed new link road – which was identified in Cheshire East’s Infrastructure Study – which is intended to alleviate traffic and associated environmental issues, as well as opening up large sites that will form an urban extension to the north of the town. However, much of this intended growth will be delivered in adjoining Parishes: there are a number of Strategic Sites identified that straddle the boundaries of the Civil Parish and the adjoining Parishes. It is difficult to determine just how much of this growth is proposed in each of the Parishes affected, but known sites within the Civil Parish of Congleton have the potential to deliver 1,342 dwellings, with the potential for additional sites to come forward over the plan period. Therefore it is considered that in excess of 2,000 homes may be delivered in the adjoining Parishes, probably around the 2,500 mark. **This would leave 1,650 to be delivered within the Civil Parish of Congleton, with 1,342 already in the pipeline. Sites for an additional 300 homes would therefore be required.**

It is considered that the Neighbourhood Plan is important for the Civil Parish of Congleton given the lack of strategic focus on the existing urban area within the Local Plan Strategy. In addition, a review of the Local Plan post-adoption is likely as the HS2 proposals progress, and its potential impact is greater understood, and the emerging relationship with the North Staffordshire authorities develops.

The People

Population and Households

As of March 2011, the Civil Parish of Congleton had a population of 26,482. By June 2013, this had increased to 26,688².

The age profile of the population is as follows (please note: this is based on ONS data from March 2011):

| Age Band | Number of Residents |
|-----------------|----------------------------|
| Aged 0-15 | 4,598 |
| Aged 16-24 | 2,399 |
| Aged 25-44 | 6,491 |
| Aged 45-64 | 7,607 |
| Aged 65+ | 5,387 |

Table 1: Civil Parish of Congleton Age Profile³

The age profile indicates that the Civil Parish's population is ageing, with almost half aged 45+. The largest proportion (28.7%) of the population is aged 45-64, the next largest being 25-44 (24.5%).

*

ONS data from March 2011 indicates that within the Civil Parish of Congleton, there are 11,561 households; the make-up of those households is as follows:

| Number in Household | Number of Households |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 persons | 3,456 |
| 2 persons | 4,236 |
| 3 persons | 1,900 |
| 4 persons | 1,487 |
| 5 persons | 361 |
| 6 persons | 96 |
| 7 persons | 14 |
| 8 persons | 11 |

Table 2: Civil Parish of Congleton Household Make-up⁴

The data indicates that the Civil Parish is dominated by smaller households of 1 or 2 persons (66.5%), and as the Table 3 below indicates, these smaller households will be dominated by single person households, and those without dependent children.

| Type of Household | Number of Households |
|---|----------------------|
| Single Person | 3,456 |
| Married Couple, Dependent Children | 1,876 |
| Married Couple, No Dependent Children | 3,798 |
| Co-Habiting Couple, Dependent Children | 462 |
| Co-Habiting Couple, No Dependent Children | 743 |
| Lone Parent, Dependent Children | 721 |
| Lone Parent, No Dependent Children | 344 |

Table 3: Civil Parish of Congleton Household Type⁵

Household Projections

DCLG's latest Household Projections (February 2015)⁶ are reported at local authority level, and indicate that over the past 15 years, Cheshire East has experienced household growth of some 18,000, from 145,000 in 1999, to 163,000 in 2014. Moving forward, further growth along a similar trajectory is expected, from **164,000 in 2015, to 180,000 in 2030**.

In addition, it anticipates that the **average household size will decrease over a similar period from 2.24 to 2.17** over a similar period.

However, these projections do not take into account issues that could have an impact across Cheshire East, such as economic growth in adjoining areas such as the Greater Manchester City Region, and major investment such as delivery of HS2.

In terms of identifying what this household growth means for the Civil Parish of Congleton, it will inevitably mean an increase. In determining what that number could be, it is considered that the most appropriate means would be to take the level of development proposed for Congleton within the new spatial distribution of development work that has recently been completed by Cheshire East Council and AECOM, and apply this to the increase of households over the period 2015-2030.

This work suggests that Congleton will need to cater for the development of **4,150 homes over the Plan period, from a total of 36,000 across Cheshire East**. This is **11.53% of Cheshire East's objectively assessed housing need, and would suggest an increase in households to 2030 of 1,845**.

It should be noted that these numbers could change further through the Examination of the Local Plan.

Economic Profile

The Economic Profile of Congleton⁷

Of the Civil Parish's current population, **16,497 (62.2%) are of working age (16-64)**, and the **median household income in 2014 was £31,300**, above the national median which is £28,500. Of those of working age, **0.9% were in receipt of Job Seeker's Allowance in 2014**, compared with 2.2% nationally.

29.2% of residents aged over 16 are qualified to degree level or above (Census 2011), which is above the national average of 27.2%.

22.1% of those aged over 16 have no qualifications, which is below the national average of 22.7%.

The area's economy has been traditionally dominated by manufacturing, principally textiles and engineering. However, this has been impacted greatly by deindustrialisation and globalisation, and **during the 10 year period from 2001 to 2011, manufacturing jobs fell from 3,200 (25.2% of the town's employment base) to 1,900 (14.8%)**. However, this is still above the national average of 8.9% in 2011 (down from 15.0% in 2001). The town's other big providers of jobs are **retail (15.9%), and health and social care (12.1%)**. In 2014, the town was home to **c1,300 private sector companies**.

The 2010 Indices of Multiple Deprivation indicated that the area – to the east of the town centre – has just **one LSOA in the most deprived 20% of England's LSOAs**.

Economic Geography and Relationships

Congleton's employment prospects have declined in recent times, and the town now has a relative shortage of jobs, and is a net exporter of labour. In 2011, **12,400 residents were in employment (including commuters), but only 9,600 people (including inward commuters) worked in the town.**⁸

Much commuting from Congleton is to other locations within Cheshire East (e.g. Macclesfield), but the town also has important relationships with the Manchester and Liverpool City Regions, and the North Staffordshire conurbation.

Housing

Housing Stock Details

According to ONS data from March 2011, there are **11,970 dwellings**⁹ across the Civil Parish registered for Council Tax, and the banding profile is as follows:

| Council Tax Band | Number of Dwellings |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| Band A | 1,520 |
| Band B | 3,391 |
| Band C | 2,625 |
| Band D | 1,726 |
| Band E | 1,659 |

| | |
|--------|-----|
| | |
| Band F | 736 |
| Band G | 297 |
| Band H | 16 |

Table 4: Council Tax Banding Profile, Civil Parish of Congleton¹⁰

The tenure of these dwellings is as follows:

| Tenure | Number of Dwellings |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| Owned Outright | 4,477 |
| Owned with Mortgage/Loan | 4,189 |
| Shared Ownership | 48 |
| Social Rent | 1,509 |
| Private Rent | 1,209 |
| Rent Free | 129 |

Table 5: Tenure Split of Dwellings across the Civil Parish of Congleton¹¹

Property Prices

Property prices across Congleton are generally above the national median. Table 6 below considers the period from April 2006 to March 2015, which illustrates how the property market crash and subsequent recession impacted on prices across the town, and how the housing market is recovering.

| Year | Apr 06- Mar 07 | Apr 07- Mar 08 | Apr 08- Mar 09 | Apr 09- Mar 10 | Apr 10- Mar 11 | Apr 11- Mar 12 | Apr 12- Mar 13 | Apr 13- Mar 14 | Apr 14- Mar 15 |
|----------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Detached | 247,475 | 275,730 | 265,000 | 214,000 | 250,000 | 185,000 | 230,500 | 247,250 | 240,000 |
| | 269,500 | 283,582 | 225,000 | 289,998 | 230,000 | 197,498 | 238,000 | 227,750 | 215,000 |
| Semi | 123,500 | 167,479 | 150,000 | 129,950 | 156,500 | 132,000 | 143,000 | 142,000 | 144,000 |
| | 162,475 | 187,990 | 122,750 | 124,999 | 134,000 | 142,250 | 114,475 | 159,000 | 163,000 |
| Terrace | 117,000 | 129,700 | 106,000 | 89,500 | 97,000 | 88,475 | 119,975 | 132,375 | 110,250 |
| | 123,000 | 117,000 | 90,000 | 118,250 | 66,000 | 100,000 | 132,500 | 154,950 | 110,000 |
| Flat | 98,000 | 124,995 | 129,089 | 137,000 | 100,000 | 90,000 | 100,000 | 84,000 | 140,975 |
| | 168,950 | 101,650 | 90,000 | 95,000 | 105,000 | 110,500 | - | 122,750 | 85,000 |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|

Table 6: Median Property Prices (based on achieved prices) across Congleton, April 2006-March 2015¹²

Current median property prices (July 2015) are as follows:

- Detached: £298,750;
- Semi: £160,000;
- Terrace: £120,000; and
- Flat: £125,000.

Prices for detached and semi-detached properties have remained relatively stable, whilst fluctuations in the terraced and flatted market are possibly reflected supply issues (strong supply of existing terraces, and a relatively limited supply of flats, particularly modern flats, and buy-to-let market activity in both).

Evidence gathered by Congleton Town Council from local estate agents illustrates a lack of semi-detached properties on the market, which – coupled with an ageing population – suggests older people are choosing to remain in their family homes, and are not choosing to downsize. This is also evidenced by slow sales activity at a recent McCarthy and Stone development at the bottom of Rood Hill. This would also explain strong housebuilder interest in Congleton, and the high number of sites coming through the planning system, both through applications, and through the Local Plan process.

Trends point towards many young people leaving the town, and this can partly be explained by housing market issues, although the main issues are education and employment. Again, evidence gathered by Congleton Town Council from local estate agents suggest that younger people have a preference of flats over terraced housing, yet the market is not responding to this. There are a number of reasons for this:

- There has been a move away from the apartment market by mainstream developers and housebuilders; and
- Many young people are struggling to buy, pushing them into either the affordable housing sector or private rented market, neither of which is catering for their preferences for a variety of reasons.

The impact of the latest changes to the Welfare System is not yet known, but are likely to lead to greater pressure on young people in housing need, and those in need of health and social care arrangements. In addition, DCLG are currently in the process of realigning their housing investment programmes from supporting the development of affordable rented products, to supporting home ownership.

Private Rents

The private rented sector has grown considerably across Cheshire East over the past ten to fifteen years, to a point where it has replaced the affordable sector as the second largest sector in Cheshire East behind home ownership¹³.

In Congleton, the private rented sector is fairly limited – there are currently around sixty properties available to rent across the town¹⁴ – and has traditionally been dominated by houses, particularly two bedroomed terraced properties. However, presently there are almost as many apartments available as houses, which is particularly surprising given the relatively limited supply.

Rents are a little lower than comparable places in Cheshire East¹⁵ which would appear to reflect the towns 'offer', that of a larger supply of terraced property, and a limited supply of more modern properties.

Current median rents (July 2015) are as follows:

| Bedrooms | Median Rent |
|----------------|-------------|
| One Bedroom | £400 |
| Two Bedrooms | £495 |
| Three Bedrooms | £650 |
| Four Bedrooms | £949 |
| Five Bedrooms | £4,000* |

*This is a bit of an anomaly as there is just one five bedroom property currently available to rent

Table 7: Median Rents by Number of Bedrooms¹⁶

Vacant Dwellings

The most up-to-date statistics relating to vacant dwellings across Congleton are from 2009 (recorded in the 2011 Census)¹⁷, which indicated some **461 vacant dwellings** (including second homes). This is around 3% of the Civil Parish's stock, which is the level that is considered reasonable to allow stock turnover.

There are more recent statistics available relating to vacant dwellings, though these are at local authority level, and indicate 4,163 vacant dwellings in 2014¹⁸. This has fallen by over 2,000 since 2009, which suggests that efforts by the local authority in reducing the number of vacant dwellings have been relatively successful. It would also suggest that the above figure for Congleton may also be smaller.

Planning

Information provided by Congleton Town Council outlines the numbers of dwellings that have received permission and have been completed or partially completed, and applications in need of further permissions, completion of a s106 agreement, or have full permission and are not yet started. This information covers the period 2010 to 2015.

| Parish | N | P | Total |
|------------------------|-----|-----|-------|
| Congleton Civil Parish | 559 | 494 | 1,053 |

Table 8: Completions, Permissions, etc. Congleton Civil Parish, 2010-2015¹⁹

In addition, it is anticipated that sites proposed within the Cheshire East Local Plan will provide a further 289 dwellings (though this may change as the Local Plan process proceeds).

As has been referred to above, much growth is planned in neighbouring Parishes, which will have knock-on effects for the Civil Parish. Therefore it is also important to consider previous permissions.

| Parish | N | P | Total |
|----------------|-----|----|-------|
| Eaton | 41 | 0 | 41 |
| Hulme Walfield | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Somerford | 208 | 77 | 285 |

Table 9: Completions, Permissions, etc. Eaton, Hulme Walfield, and Somerford Civil Parishes, 2010-2015²⁰

In addition, it is anticipated that Strategic Sites within the Cheshire East Local Plan will see the allocation of a range of sites, and the updated evidence base suggests that Congleton will need to cater for a total of 4,150 dwellings over the plan period, an increase of 650 from the submission version. It is important to note that this figure includes development within all four of the above Parishes, and that the figure may change again as the Local Plan process progresses.

Market Profile

Congleton is a traditional market town, which also benefited from a range of local industries. However, the town is now ageing: almost half of the Civil Parish's population is aged 45+, and the largest proportion of the population is aged 45-64. Household size is reducing, and evidence suggests that older people are choosing to remain in their family homes rather than downsizing, and this is reflected by a relative lack of family housing such as semi-detached houses on the market.

As the town's traditional role has changed, the need to reinvent its economy has grown, and these challenges still remain. Congleton is a net exporter of labour, with much commuting within Cheshire East, and to adjoining areas such as the Manchester and Liverpool City Regions, and the North Staffordshire conurbation. The town's changing economy is reflected in the attitudes of younger people towards housing: Congleton has a strong supply of smaller terraced properties; local agents suggest that younger people have a preference for apartments, though the affordable sector and mainstream developers are not responding to this.

Although Congleton's economic role has changed, the town still remains a popular location due to its attractive historic character, the attractiveness of its surroundings, and its accessibility. This is reflected by the town's house prices which are above the national median, and strong interest from the housebuilding industry. The majority of homes in Congleton are either owned outright, or with a mortgage. One of the consequences of this is a continued need for affordable housing.

The private rented market in Congleton is relatively affordable in comparison with similar locations across Cheshire East, though this is probably due to the relatively high numbers of smaller properties (mainly terraced) within the sector.

The impact of Welfare Reform is not yet known, but Congleton has just one LSOA in the country's most deprived 20%, and a lower than average number claiming JSA, so the impact in the town could be limited. However, it will be important to examine how the changes impact on the elderly population. Housing related interventions – for example building modern smaller properties to high standards – could minimise negative effects for both the young and old.

Key indicators:

- Congleton is ageing: almost half of the Civil Parish's population is aged 45+ (49%).
- There is a dominance of smaller households (66.5% of households are of 1 or 2 people).
- Traditional industries have shrunk over the past 15 years or so; Congleton is now a net exporter of labour.
- Congleton still remains a popular location for families.
- Affordability remains a key issue.
- Younger people's housing requirements need to be considered.

Local Housing Need and Demand

Congleton is a 'Key Service Centre' within the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy, though its designation is as a town, and not as a number of separate but connected Parishes. The latest objectively assessed housing need for Cheshire East indicates a need for 36,000 homes over the plan period, with recent spatial distribution work carried out by AECOM on behalf of Cheshire East Council indicating a requirement for Congleton (the town as a whole, and not the Civil Parish of Congleton) to deliver 4,150 of these new homes, a large proportion of which will be in adjoining Parishes (2,526: existing commitments and proposed Strategic Sites within the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy).

In terms of a housing target for the Civil Parish of Congleton, a figure of **1,624 homes** should be catered for within the Neighbourhood Plan (the new Local Plan target for Congleton as a town, less homes proposed within adjoining Parishes), the target being made up of:

- There are currently **1,053** homes with a permission of some form (and this includes recent completions and the like).
- A range of sites with the potential for **289** homes are proposed through the Cheshire East Local Plan.
- A balance of **282** homes.

In terms of determining local housing need, it is considered appropriate to focus on areas of need that the market will not, or is unlikely to cater for. This could then form the basis for policy making within the Neighbourhood Plan. The Growth Scenarios outlined in Section 3 consider how this need could be exacerbated, and opportunities that could address this.

The urban area of Congleton, and northern edge of the town around the business parks are identified as Strategic Locations within the Cheshire East Local Plan, and it is these broad locations where the majority of growth and development is planned.

In terms of need and demand, based on the evidence examined, the following will need to be addressed and considered across Congleton:

- **Delivery of Family Housing:** the demand for family housing from buyers remains strong, and will in the main be catered for by the market. There is continued strong interest from housebuilders, delivering a mid-market offer, with products such as Help-to-Buy helping to cater for first time buyers, whilst the new Starter Homes Initiative may see sites proposed to take advantage of this, though this would have an impact on the delivery of affordable housing. Encouragement could be offered to developers that deliver a lower market product.
- **Delivery of Affordable Housing:** there is strong need and demand for affordable housing across Congleton linked to relatively high house prices, and a limited supply. There is the potential for supply issues to be exacerbated by programmes such as the Starter Homes

Initiative, and recent announcements relating to the rent settlement, and the restructure of DCLG funding programmes to focus on home ownership.

- **Encouragement of Downsizing/Last Time Buyers:** a more efficient use of housing stock could free-up family housing which could in turn alleviate some of the development pressures that Congleton faces. There is evidence of older residents choosing to remain in their family homes as opposed to downsizing, and it is considered that some work could be done to understand what – if anything – could encourage older residents to consider other housing options.
- **Development of a Modern Urban Housing Offer:** Congleton – particular the town centre – needs to reinvent itself in order to respond to its changing economy and its ageing population, and a key element of this would be to develop a modern urban housing offer, delivering new homes in locations close to local services, which will help to revitalise the town centre. Such an approach would help Congleton to retain and attract younger people, and help sustain the town into the future.
- **Encouragement of New Investment Models:** in response to changes in society and the economy, many private investors are beginning to look more favourably on housing as an investment proposition, with some examining the potential of social housing and the private rented sector. There is the potential to exploit this in order to diversify the town's housing offer, and address some of the issues that have been outlined above.

In terms of delivery, it is considered that the issues that the Neighbourhood Plan could focus on could be:

- Encouragement of an affordable home ownership offer, particularly tailored to first time buyers;
- Delivery of affordable housing;
- Encouragement of opportunities for downsizing/last time buying;
- Development of a modern housing offer in inner urban locations;
- Exploration of alternative forms of delivery in view of a lack of response to key issues from the market; and
- Capitalising on the proposed locations for a growth to support the regeneration of key sites in and around the town centre.

4. Growth Scenarios

Introduction

In the original proposal from Urban Vision Enterprise, it was proposed to agree and develop a number of Growth Scenarios, from which an agreed Growth Scenario would be developed that would underpin policy making for the Neighbourhood Plan. At the second meeting with members of the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group, a number of scenarios were agreed for examination, and these were:

- Scenario 1: Major Infrastructure Investment (Congleton Link Road);
- Scenario 2: Major Economic Growth (Linked to Congleton Link Road);
- Scenario 3: HS2 On or Off; and
- Scenario 4: Increased Inward and Outward Migration.

The fourth growth scenario was a particular request from the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group.

Each scenario is considered in order.

Scenario 1: Major Infrastructure Investment (Congleton Link Road)

Given the number of homes already in the pipeline within the Congleton area, it is considered that the proposed link road is already a much needed and vital piece of infrastructure. Additional growth without the link road would be an unacceptable situation, would further damage the town's economy, and have a major negative environmental impact.

East-west road links across Cheshire East are poor, and journey times and congestion at key points provide environmental challenges and are a brake on economic growth. There are particular challenges in and around Congleton, and these are acute where the A34, A54, and A534 merge²¹.

A by-pass (Mountbatten Way/Rood Hill) was built during the 1970s to relieve the town centre of heavy traffic, but as the town has grown over the years, a number of other pressure points have developed, which affects the local environment and economy.

This, coupled with changes to the town's economy over the past 15 years or so, means that Congleton has a relative shortage of jobs and is a net exporter of labour²². In order to combat this, a new link road is proposed to the north of the town, which would leave the A534 to the west of the town, cross the Radnor Valley, and join the A536 just north east of Eaton, a small village to the north of Congleton. As well as addressing traffic and associated environmental issues, the new link road is intended to open up a range of large sites for housing and employment related development in the form of an urban extension to the town, though the majority of this is located within adjoining Parishes. It is expected that the urban extension would make a major financial contribution to the delivery of the link road²³.

It is understood that Cheshire East Council are developing a planning application to secure the route of the new link road, though it is not yet clear whether or not all of the required funds are in place for its delivery. Clearly s106 contributions are not yet in place.

Should the new link road progress, it is likely to have a positive impact on traffic flows on the A534 and A34, and air quality and traffic safety will improve in the areas immediately affected.

In terms of the proposed urban extension, a key element of this will be the extension of two existing employment sites, Congleton Business Park, and the Radnor Park Industrial Estate; the delivery of the link road is critical to these proposals, which are designed to bring new jobs to the town. However, it will be important to consider the proposals in the context of Congleton's role within the proposed "corridor of opportunity"²⁴, and growth proposals in the Borough's two principal towns of Crewe and Macclesfield. Major proposals are planned at Basford, south of Crewe. In addition, Congleton is just a short distance from Junction 17 of the M6, which is the location of another strategic proposal – Capricorn Park, which will include a large proportion of employment uses. Both of these sites would provide significant competition, and are closer to strategic highways connections. In addition, Basford could be the location for the proposed HS2 Hub Station, which would provide an additional economic driver.

Therefore, it would be vital that proposals at all three of these locations are developed in a complementary manner in order to ensure their success.

If the proposals are simply a replication of others elsewhere, there is the potential for progress to be sluggish, or for the balance of development to change, with an increase in residential development later in the plan period. In addition, wider economic issues could have an impact on how things proceed.

The delivery of the link road could also lead to additional development pressures, which could combine with other issues relating to the growth agenda to trigger a review of the Local Plan.

The nature of the proposals could also have implications for the future of Congleton Town Centre, and it will be important to ensure that proposals for the urban extension do not undermine the viability and vitality of the town centre. The urban extension could provide a great opportunity to generate resources to tackle delivery issues relating to more difficult sites in and around the town centre if a flexible approach to s106 contributions was taken, though the overriding issue will of course be securing contributions for the link road.

The creation of additional jobs within Congleton would be welcomed, and may help to keep younger people in the town, and attract new younger residents. The housing needs and demands of younger people have been outlined in Section 2 above, and could provide the impetus for market interest in delivering a suitable housing offer. If such an offer could be delivered in and around the town centre, it would provide a major boost for the local economy.

Scenario 2: Major Economic Growth (Linked to Congleton Link Road)

In many respects, this scenario has been considered as part of Scenario 1, as the two things under consideration are intrinsically linked. There is also the potential for increased economic growth to also increase inward migration, which is considered further in Scenario 4 below.

Scenario 3: HS2 On or Off

Proposals for an extension to the high speed rail network are being developed, and the Bill that will pave the way for the construction of HS2 is expected before Parliament in the autumn. It is expected that the Bill will be passed, and the construction of the new railway line will have big implications for South Cheshire.

It is expected that Crewe will be the location of a hub station for HS2, and HS2 Ltd. are currently examining a number of opportunities with Cheshire East Council, Network Rail and other stakeholders

in terms of the most appropriate site. However, Basford would appear to be the favoured site, where a proportion of the Basford West site has been identified for a HS2 maintenance depot²⁵.

Cheshire East Council's 'High Growth City' strategy for Crewe envisages significant population growth for the town, alongside the creation of thousands of new jobs. The Council's strategy for Crewe has the securing of a HS2 hub station at its heart, and it is anticipated that growth in Crewe will have a ripple effect, with knock-on effects in places such as Nantwich, Alsager, Sandbach, Congleton, Middlewich, and perhaps even as far as Macclesfield²⁶. Indeed, Cheshire East Local Plan's 'Planning for Growth' strategy refers to a "corridor of opportunity", taking in Crewe in the west to Macclesfield in the east²⁷.

We are already starting to see increased interest in Crewe from the development industry. South of the town there are around 20 residential development sites either started, or at various stages within the planning process, and agents DTZ noted in the 'Crewe Town Centre Regeneration Framework for Growth' prepared for Cheshire East Council that housebuilders were beginning to show more of an interest in the area, "on the back of HS2 announcements"²⁸. We are also beginning to see the first signs of property speculation in and around Crewe: the site that houses the large B&Q store a short distance from the town's existing railway station and within an area that may be affected by HS2 related plans has recently been bought by an investor for a sum in the region of £24million, much above its present value.

Economic opportunity and housing growth in Crewe may take some of the development pressures away from more distant parts of South Cheshire, for example Congleton. However, current evidence would suggest that this may not actually be the case; Congleton continues to be a popular location for housebuilding on its own merits.

The presence of a HS2 hub station in Crewe may have the effect of drawing commuters to the town to use high speed rail services, which would increase pressure on the main routes to the area, such as the A500 and the A534.

Another issue that would need to be given due consideration would be services on the stretch of the West Coast Mainline that serves Congleton. Recent announcements regarding investment on Northern Powerhouse rail projects have not been positive, suggesting that rail investment in the regions may be limited in order to allow the delivery of HS2. If services on the West Coast Mainline were to be downgraded in anyway, this could have a negative impact on Congleton, and the services that could be accessed from the town's railway station.

On the positive side, there has been talk of running 'classic compatibles' – trains that can run on the existing West Coast Mainline, and also the high speed line – from Stockport, with the trains joining the HS2 line between Stafford and Lichfield. If this was delivered, there would be the potential for Congleton to secure stops. Such developments would probably lead to an increase development pressures in and around the town.

Scenario 4: Increased Inward and Outward Migration

The biggest driver of inward and outward migration will be education and employment opportunities. Outward migration of younger people may continue if their needs are not catered for, and may continue to some extent for education and employment reasons anyway.

As has been outlined previously, Congleton is currently a net exporter of labour, and the economic growth proposals are designed to help combat this. An increase in employment opportunities

available in the town could increase inward migration, particularly given the relative affordability of the town's private rented sector.

Other issues that may influence inward migration patterns could be the delivery of HS2 and related services (as outline in Scenario 3), and continued overheating of the housing market in the north of the Borough, and the South Manchester market.

Preferred Growth Scenario

The preferred growth scenario would probably be the one that presents the best opportunities to help housing need related issued across Congleton, and would be allied with the growth proposals and infrastructure investment that are currently planned, and outlined in Scenario 1.

This scenario could provide the impetus and investment to help deliver need related issues, and the best opportunity to stimulate market interest. However, a positive and proactive approach by the Town Council and a positive working relationship with Cheshire East Council will be vital.

The Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy²⁹ has identified a range of Strategic Sites across Congleton, the majority of which are located in adjoining Parishes. Although there is a 'town centre first' policy embedded within the Strategy, there is no strategic focus on the town centre and surrounding areas. Therefore this could be an area on which the Neighbourhood Plan could focus.

Policies could be developed in order to support the bringing forward of sites to address the needs set out in Section 2, namely:

- Encouragement of an affordable home ownership offer, particularly tailored to first time buyers;
- Delivery of affordable housing;
- Encouragement of opportunities for downsizing/last time buying;
- Development of a modern housing offer in inner urban locations;
- Exploration of alternative forms of delivery in view of a lack of response to key issues from the market; and
- Capitalising on the proposed locations for a growth to support the regeneration of key sites in and around the town centre.

The Neighbourhood Plan can make site allocations, and therefore it may be appropriate to make site allocations to address the identified needs.

It is also recommended that the Town Council also considers further work in terms of how to address identified needs.

5. Conclusions

In summary, the key issues for Congleton Town Council to consider when developing housing related policies for the Neighbourhood Plan are as follows.

Meeting a housing target for the Civil Parish of Congleton of **1,624 homes** within the Neighbourhood Plan (the new Local Plan target for Congleton as a town – 4,150 – less homes proposed within adjoining Parishes – 2,526), the target being made up of:

- There are currently **1,053** homes with a permission of some form (and this includes recent completions and the like).
- A range of sites with the potential for **289** homes are proposed through the Cheshire East Local Plan.
- A balance of **282** homes.

Housing need related issues to be addressed include:

- Catering for the needs of an ageing population.
- Catering for the need and demands of younger people.
- Addressing affordability.
- Creating a modern housing offer.
- New delivery models where the market is not addressing key issues.
- Targeting sites in and around the town centre.

As well as developing policies to address these issues, the Town Council should also consider:

- Further work to understand how specific issues (e.g. how downsizing can be encouraged) can be addressed.
- Allocation of sites within the Neighbourhood Plan.
- How they are able to enable delivery through working positively and proactively with Cheshire East Council.

Notes

- ¹ Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy – Submission Version (Cheshire East Council, March 2014), and Schedule of Suggested Revisions to the Local Plan Strategy (Cheshire East Council, August 2015)
- ² Census 2011 (Office for National Statistics, March 2011 and updates)
- ³ Census 2011 (Office for National Statistics, March 2011 and updates)
- ⁴ Census 2011 (Office for National Statistics, March 2011 and updates)
- ⁵ Census 2011 (Office for National Statistics, March 2011 and updates)
- ⁶ Household Projections (DCLG, February 2015)
- ⁷ Census 2011 (Office for National Statistics, March 2011 and updates), and Congleton Economic Profile (Cheshire East Council, November 2014)
- ⁸ Congleton Economic Profile (Cheshire East Council, November 2014)
- ⁹ Census 2011 (Office for National Statistics, March 2011 and updates)
- ¹⁰ Census 2011 (Office for National Statistics, March 2011 and updates)
- ¹¹ Census 2011 (Office for National Statistics, March 2011 and updates)
- ¹² www.home.co.uk (data taken July 2015)
- ¹³ www.home.co.uk (data taken July 2015)
- ¹⁴ www.home.co.uk (data taken July 2015)
- ¹⁵ www.home.co.uk (data taken July 2015)
- ¹⁶ www.home.co.uk (data taken July 2015)
- ¹⁷ Census 2011 (Office for National Statistics, March 2011 and updates)
- ¹⁸ Housing Statistics (DCLG, April 2015)
- ¹⁹ Planning Application in Congleton (Congleton Town Council, July 2015)
- ²⁰ Planning Application in Congleton (Congleton Town Council, July 2015)
- ²¹ Congleton Traffic Model: Assessment of Local Plan Strategy Highway Impacts and Mitigation (Cheshire East Council, May 2014)
- ²² Congleton Economic Profile (Cheshire East Council, November 2014)
- ²³ Congleton Traffic Model: Assessment of Local Plan Strategy Highway Impacts and Mitigation (Cheshire East Council, May 2014)
- ²⁴ Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy – Submission Version (Cheshire East Council, March 2014), and Schedule of Suggested Revisions to the Local Plan Strategy (Cheshire East Council, August 2015)
- ²⁵ High Speed Rail: Investing in Britain's Future – Consultation on the route from the West Midlands to Leeds, Manchester and Beyond (Department for Transport, July 2013)
- ²⁶ All Change for Crewe: High Growth City (Cheshire East Council, September 2013)
- ²⁷ Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy – Submission Version (Cheshire East Council, March 2014), and Schedule of Suggested Revisions to the Local Plan Strategy (Cheshire East Council, August 2015)
- ²⁸ Crewe Town Centre Regeneration Framework for Growth (DTZ, June 2015)
- ²⁹ Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy – Submission Version (Cheshire East Council, March 2014), and Schedule of Suggested Revisions to the Local Plan Strategy (Cheshire East Council, August 2015)

Other sources include:

- Cheshire East Strategic Housing Market Assessment (Cheshire East Council/arc⁴, September 2013)
- Cheshire East Strategic Housing Market Assessment: Extra Care Housing (Cheshire East Council/Peter Fletcher Associates/arc⁴, July 2010)
- Private Rented Sector in Cheshire East (Cheshire East Council, 2013)
- Cheshire East Council Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment – Congleton Area (Cheshire East Council, 2012)
- Cheshire East Housing Strategic: Moving Forward 2011-2016 (Cheshire East Council, 2011)
- Private Sector House Condition Survey (Cheshire East Council/CPC, 2010)

- Vulnerable and Older People's Housing Strategy (Cheshire East Council, May 2014)