

Brereton Parish Council
Brereton Neighbourhood Plan
Statement on Sustainability Appraisal and Development

About this Document

This document provides a statement on Sustainability Appraisal in relation to the emerging Brereton Parish Neighbourhood Plan Pre-Submission version.

Sustainable Development

The achievement of sustainable development lies at the core of the plan-led approach to development which is the main objective of planning in this country based on the National Planning Policy Framework. The Framework sets out an approach to sustainable development which seeks to foster growth which leads in turn to economic, social and environmental progress. A Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is part of the process which seeks to ensure that all plans and major projects comply with the principles of sustainable development. That process also includes the need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). This note explains how the Brereton Neighbourhood Plan has sought to comply with the relevant requirements in respect of the SA. The need for an SEA is being addressed by Cheshire East Council as the Local Planning Authority. The Cheshire East Local Plan Core Strategy includes the presumption in favour of sustainable development as a “golden thread” running through the strategy.

The need for a Sustainability Appraisal

The Planning Advisory Service (PAS) is part of the Local Government Association (LGA) and is directly funded by the Departments for Communities and Local Government to help local authorities understand and respond to planning reform.

Their advice in terms of Neighbourhood Plans is as follows:

“Do Neighbourhood Plans require Sustainability Appraisals?”

Neighbourhood Development Plans are not Development Plan Documents. Therefore legally they do not require Sustainability Appraisals associated with Development Plan Documents.

Do we need to carry out a Strategic Environmental Assessment?

The Localism Act 2011 requires neighbourhood plans to not breach, and be otherwise compatible with, EU and Human Rights obligations.

It is not the case that every neighbourhood plan will need an environmental assessment of the type normally associated with the process of preparing local plans. Ambitious and complex neighbourhood plans may trigger various EU Directives (including the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive and Habitats Directive), and may need to undertake additional procedures and assessment depending on the scale and impact of the plan proposals.

It helps to assess if an environmental assessment is needed at the earliest stages so that, the gathering of evidence for it and its preparation can be integrated into the process of producing the neighbourhood plan. Local planning authorities are advised to put in place a process under which they can screen neighbourhood plan proposals for adverse impacts on the environment.”

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Development Plan Documents (DPDs) require a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). A Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP), although able to do many of the same things as a DPD, does not require a SA and does not automatically require a SEA. Whether a neighbourhood plan group need to carry out a SEA will depend on what the plan contains. This broadly falls into two categories, those plans allocating sites for future development and those not allocating sites. In general, if the neighbourhood plan does not allocate sites or does not make any land allocations, there is no need to do a SA, but the plan should make reference to sustainability issues and how it supports sustainable development. The Brereton Neighbourhood Plan makes no specific land allocations for new development, although there are policies concerning new development.

Cheshire East Council

As the relevant Local Planning Authority for the parish of Brereton, Cheshire East Borough Council has been consulted throughout the preparation of the Brereton Neighbourhood Plan. A screening opinion has been requested from the Cheshire East Council. A screening opinion will determine whether a full SEA is required, or state the reasons why such an assessment is not required for the Brereton Neighbourhood Plan.

Sustainable Development for Brereton parish

In the drafting of planning policies and proposals, the Brereton Neighbourhood Plan process has sought to embed the principles of sustainable development as set out in international and national legislation and guidance. These include:

- meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs
- living within the planet's environmental limits
- ensuring a strong, healthy and just society
- achieving a sustainable economy
- promoting good governance
- and using science responsibly.

The policies in the Brereton Neighbourhood Plan have been developed to support and align with Sustainability Appraisal work undertaken by Cheshire East Council for its Local Plan Core Strategy.

Sustainability Appraisal work has been undertaken by the Borough Council at all stages of the preparation of the Local Plan Strategy including the submission stage reached in May 2014. The Local Plan Inspector, in considering the Sustainability Appraisal for the Core Strategy, considered it to be a comprehensive document which evaluated the predicted social, economic and environmental effects of the policies and proposals in the submitted version of the Local Plan along with the required mitigation and consideration of reasonable alternatives.

At the current time of writing (April 2015) the Borough Council is undertaking further work at the request of the Inspector in order to overcome some of his concerns about the deliverability of the Local Plan. In particular, he has asked the Council to fully assess the implications of a higher level of growth. The Borough Council has

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commissioned external consultants in a number of specialist areas to advise them on certain matters including undertaking additional Sustainability Appraisal work. In particular, this will relate to the proposed level of future housing provision which he considered to be inadequate to secure the success of overall economic, employment and housing strategy.

The Planning Inspector has however accepted the proposed settlement hierarchy for the Local Plan so whatever the overall additional amount of new housing required, Brereton parish would remain as a small rural settlement lying in the countryside and without a specific housing requirement to be met. Furthermore, the Inspector identified the need for further work to address the development needs in the north of the Borough (lying within the area of the former Macclesfield Borough Council) which does not include the Brereton area. Brereton parish would be covered by the general policy for development in other settlements and rural areas which are expected to accommodate in the order of 5 hectares of employment land and 2000 new houses (Policy PG 6 of the submission version of the Core Strategy refers). The majority of Brereton parish is also covered by proposed policy PG5 which concerns Open Countryside and which limits development to essential rural needs.

Public engagement in the preparation of the Brereton Neighbourhood Plan has been a fundamental aim and the stages undertaken to date are summarised in other documents. It is clear that the local community has not just supported the principle of a plan-led and sustainable approach to development in Brereton, but has also demonstrated this in the types of responses received at each stage in the consultation process.

Policies within the Brereton Neighbourhood Plan have been derived from applying policies in the emerging Cheshire East Local Plan and the proposed Saved policies from the existing Congleton Borough Local Plan at a more local level and have been based on community engagement within the local area. In particular, policies in the Cheshire East Local Plan within the policy section Planning for Sustainable Development (policy numbers SD1 And SD2) have been taken as guiding principles since that Local Plan was submitted by Cheshire East for examination in May 2014. Policy development work for the Brereton Neighbourhood Plan from May 2014 until April 2015 proceeded on the basis of seeking compliance with those strategic principles.

The Brereton Neighbourhood Plan preparation has also had the advantage of benefitting from experience emerging from other communities in Cheshire and beyond over the last three years as they sought to apply the principles of sustainable development to their local areas through their neighbourhood plans. Among the common themes emerging which has influenced the Brereton Neighbourhood Plan are the following:

- To reduce the need to travel, particularly to access local goods and services

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- To improve access within and around the area by other means than the private car and particularly by walking, cycling and public transport
- To promote good design in planning new development including Building for Life
- To protect and where appropriate improve local areas of importance for their nature conservation, landscape and heritage value
- To support local employment including small scale and small businesses in the area
- To support small scale re-use and conversion of existing buildings to other appropriate uses
- To support small scale housing development which meets local housing needs including affordable homes
- To minimise energy use and promote energy efficiency
- To protect and enhance local services and facilities serving a dispersed rural area
- To protect and enhance different types of open space and recreation uses with their wider health and wellbeing benefits.

Conclusion

The Brereton Neighbourhood Plan has been prepared to comply with international, national and Cheshire East Borough Council strategic planning policies in respect of sustainable development. Policy formulation has been based on the strategic policy framework set out in the Submission version of the Cheshire East Local Plan (May 2014). Consultation has been undertaken with officers of Cheshire East Council throughout the plan preparation period which has included the need to achieve a sustainable approach to development in Cheshire East and Brereton as part of the Borough. The local community has responded positively in its response to consultation through the plan making period. The recent experience of other communities in Cheshire and elsewhere in integrating a sustainable approach to future development of their areas into their neighbourhood plans has enabled the Brereton community to benefit and learn from that experience. For these reasons, this note has provided an explanation as to why at this stage of the plan it is considered unnecessary to produce a full Sustainability Appraisal, but a summary of how the Brereton Neighbourhood Plan does propose sustainable approaches to the future of Brereton parish.