 8 November 2022

Sent to macclesfieldregenerationteam@cheshireeast.gov.uk

From info@congleton-tc.gov.uk

Dear Cheshire East Council Regeneration Team,

**Congleton Town Vitality Plan Consultation – response from Congleton Town Council**

Congleton Town Council’s Community and Environment Committee considered the Congleton Town Vitality Plan at its meeting on the 3November 2022. This response is on behalf of the CTC Committee. The Town Council’s Regeneration Working Group has also inputted into the plan on several occasions and were invited to a couple of meeting with Cushman and Wakefield.

 Firstly, Congleton Town Council wanted to thank Cheshire East Council and its officers for commissioning the work and giving focus to the nine service towns. We very much hope that the vitality plans will result in some positive action and lead to investment in the nine service centres in addition to the normal focus on Crewe and Macclesfield. Naturally, as our remit is Congleton, our response is only directed to the actions mentioned in the Congleton Town Centre Vitality Plan.

Congleton Town Council, in principle, saw merit in all ten actions put forward by Cushman and Wakefield in the report, although believed some actions had more merit than others. Many of the proposed actions support other plans, principles or proposals that both authorities already support. These include ideas set out in the Local Transport Plan, Active Travel, making our towns as accessible and inclusive as possible and taking account of the climate change and nature emergencies. The actions were also in line with principles being promoted through the draft Congleton Neighbourhood Plan and harmonious with the Local Plan and Transport Plan.

Having read the proposals Congleton Town Council thought the highest level of support ‘**very important’** should be given to:

* Actions 4 – Opportunities for change around the Market Hall area
* Action 1 – Opportunities for change around the Museum and Police Station
* Action 9 – Tackling Void Properties

Congleton Town Council thought:

* Action 2 – Repairing the Severance and Impact of Mountbatten Way – was the action that was least achievable or cost-effective and gave it level 3 – ‘**not very important’** level of support

Congleton Town Council gave the other six actions a **‘fairly important’** status.

**More details on each of the proposals**

Congleton Town Council wanted to make it clear that it would be a willing partner working with Cheshire East Council on these proposals should funding or opportunities to develop the actions become available. Below follows more detail on Congleton Town Council’s response in relation to the various proposals.

We would expect a detailed environmental and inclusivity assessment to be conducted in relation to the projects ahead of more detailed programmed work. We very much hope that the research, effort and expense spent on these detailed plans will result in positive action.

**1. Opportunities for change around Congleton Museum and Police Station**

**CTC Response:** This is an interesting proposal, it is a great site that currently serves little purpose, other than a potential development site for the future. Congleton Town Council and Congleton in Bloom has approached Cheshire East several times about permission to use the site for event purposes or to make it temporarily more attractive for wildlife, residents and visitors. We believe this green space has the potential to serve a useful purpose and add to the vitality and interest of the town. The land is within CEC ownership and is maintained by Congleton Town Council.

As the museum is mentioned in this action, Councillors wanted to make sure that the Cheshire East Council regeneration team is aware that there is a desire for Congleton museum to relocate to a larger and more suitable location in the town. If the museum were to move this should not impact this project to open up the green space.

**2. Repairing the severance and impact of Mountbatten Way**

**CTC Response**: The Town Council recognises that Mountbatten Way does create a barrier between the town centre and the park, paddling pool and museum, and this sort of development would no longer be acceptable. However, it was thought that the solution mentioned would be astronomically expensive and that other actions mentioned in the Town Vitality Plan were more achievable and realistic. For this reason, level 3 support was given, the lowest awarded to any of the actions.

As a side to this action, the Town Council noted that it would like to see fewer barriers on Mountbatten Way, and other routes through town and would welcome a discussion with Cheshire East Council on how this could be achieved.

**3. Enhancing Walking and Cycling**

**CTC Response**: The proposals raised in this action are in line with proposals that Congleton Town Council has already supported in the CEC Local Transport Plan and is recommending in its draft Neighbourhood Plan. We do believe it is especially important that there are safe routes for people to walk and cycle into and around the town. For the Town Centre Vitality Plan we do not believe this priority will have the greatest impact on the vitality of the town and so are giving it a ‘**fairly important’** rating.

**4. Opportunities for change around Market Hall**

**CTC Response:** We believe improving the area around the Market Hall and Princess Street area could have the greatest impact on Congleton Town Centre’s vitality. There is already a proactive developer linked to this area who has started improvement works. Congleton is a market town and for many years this market hall area has felt neglected and although only metres from the main pedestrian area, does not look attractive and inviting. Much of the area is owned by Cheshire East Council and the Town Council believes there is a lot of support to improve this area and its links to Mill Street and Bridge Street. This is something that has been promised and stalled for two decades. Congleton Town Council thought this was an important project and would like to see it promoted ahead of the other actions.

**5. Showcasing Congleton’s Heritage**

**CTC Response**: Congleton Town Council was pleased that the authors recognised that the town has several high-quality heritage buildings. We also have nationally important heritage buildings in close proximity to Congleton that attract thousands of visitors. Heritage is important to Congleton, and this is recognised in the draft Congleton Neighbourhood Plan. We would like to see more effort put into securing and safeguarding our important heritage town centre buildings and bringing them back into use, such as Moody Hall, John Bradshaw House and Kinsey Street Church. We would welcome support from Cheshire East on this important matter of bringing these buildings back into use. We would also welcome working with CEC or other partners on showcasing our heritage. This action was given a ‘fairly important’ status as although important, Councillor felt not as important as 1, 4 and 9.

**6. Making More of Community Assets**

**CTC Response**: Congleton agreed with the proposals for this action and works hard to maintain the attractiveness of the town centre, put on a programme of events and preserve the green spaces and pocket gardens in the town centre. We would welcome CEC’s help in helping the town remain attractive by:

1. Insisting that utility companies and others working on town centre pavements and walkways use the appropriate materials to reinstate after works. Replacing broken paving slabs with tarmac or using the wrong materials following an installation makes the town look uncared for.
2. Establishing the ownership and maintenance responsibilities for street furniture in town centres. A promised CEC consultation in 2018 never happened.
3. Insisting that estate agents advertising properties remove the sales boards and batons holding the sales boards once the property has been sold/let.

This action was given a ‘Fairly Important’ status as it was felt other actions were more essential

**7. Raising Congleton’s profile**

**CTC Response:** Congleton Town Council is always receptive to ideas to help promote and enhance the marketing and promotion of Congleton. A new website for the town is included in the CTC budget, is in the business plan and is programmed for 2023. Congleton is happy to work with other key service towns on mutually beneficial promotions and is open to ideas from CEC on cross-town or borough-wide promotions or initiatives. This action was given a **Fairly Important** status as the council believed other actions were more essential.

**8. Mobilising the Business Community**

**CTC Response**: There is always more that can be done with networking and communications and both officers and councillors have been engaging with the business community. We are fortunate to have an active Chamber of Commerce and are in regular communications with town centre shops, pubs and businesses. This action was given a **Fairly Important** status as the council believed other actions were more essential.

**9. Tackling Void properties**

**CTC Response:** It would be great to bring empty and under-utilised buildings in the town centre back into use – whether residential, retail, business or leisure. The Town Council would welcome the opportunity to work with Cheshire East Council on any pilots to help in this area. The principal authority has powers around development control, business rates, planning and enforcement as well as positive links with the business hub and growth hub to help the town reduce its vacancy rate through carrot-and-stick approaches.

Several developers and businesses have already recognised the growth potential for Congleton Town Centre resulting in some exciting and quality developments. We would like to see more developers feel welcome, supported and encouraged to invest in Congleton. The Town Council gave this the highest level of **VERY IMPORTANT**.

**10. Enhancing Public Transport**

**CTC response:** It is recognised that public transport in Cheshire East and Congleton is poor. Surveys conducted by the Town Council’s Integrated Transport Working Group has shown that many people in Congleton would use bus services if it was regular, reliable, cost effective and went to where they wanted to go. Currently the offer falls far short. We know CEC has not been successful in gaining Government funding to enhance bus improvements and so although this is something that the Town Council would like to see, we believe other priorities are more achievable in the current climate and for that reason gave this a **Fairly Important** rating.

I hope the detailed feedback from Congleton Town Council’s Community and Environment Committee is useful. We are extremely keen to see ideas developed in this document come to fruition to benefit our town and look forward to hearing what the next steps are or what funding streams are available to help make the actions a reality.

If you need any clarification on points raised in this please do not hesitate to contact me on jackie.macarthur@congleton-tc.gov.uk or 01260 270350 ext. 3 .

Kind regards



Jackie MacArthur, Deputy Chief Officer, Communities and Marketing

Congleton Town Council 