

# INDEPENDENT EXAMINATION OF THE CONGLETON

## NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN

EXAMINER: Andrew Freeman BSc (Hons) DipTP DipEM FRTPI

Examination Ref: 01/AF/CNP

Cathy Dean  
Congleton Town Council

Greg Woolridge  
Strategic Planning Officer  
Cheshire East Council

Via email

27 November 2025

Dear Ms Dean and Mr Woolridge

Following the submission of the Congleton Neighbourhood Development Plan (the Plan) for examination, I would like to clarify several initial procedural matters. I also have a number of questions for Congleton Town Council (the Town Council) to which I would like to receive a written response by **Thursday 11 December 2025**, if possible.

### 1. Examination Documentation

I can confirm that I am satisfied that I have received the draft Plan and accompanying documentation, including the Basic Conditions Statement; the Consultation Statement; the Strategic Environmental (SEA) Screening Assessment, the Environmental Assessment Statement and the Regulation 16 representations, to enable me to undertake the examination.

Subject to my detailed assessment of the draft Plan, I have not at this initial stage identified any very significant and obvious flaws in the Plan that might lead me to advise that the examination should not proceed.

### 2. Site Visit

Subject to receipt of answers to my questions, I shall aim to carry out the site visit in the week commencing 22 December 2025. The site visit will assist in my assessment of the draft Plan, including the issues identified in the representations.

The visit will be undertaken unaccompanied. It is very important that I am not approached to discuss any aspects of the Plan or the neighbourhood area, as this may be perceived to prejudice my independence and risk compromising the fairness of the examination process.

I may have some additional questions, following my site visit, which I will set out in writing should I require any further clarification.

### 3. Written Representations

At this stage, I consider the examination can be conducted solely by the written representations procedure, without the need for a hearing. However, I will reserve the option to convene a hearing should a matter(s) come to light where I consider that a hearing is necessary to ensure the adequate examination of an issue, or to ensure that a person has a fair chance to put a case.

#### 4. Further Clarification

From my initial assessment of the Plan and supporting documents, I have identified a number of matters where I require some additional information from the Town Council.

I have 24 questions seeking further clarification, which I have set out in the Annex to this letter. I would be grateful if you can seek to provide a written response(s) by **Thursday 11 December 2025**.

#### 5. Examination Timetable

As you will be aware, the intention is to examine the Plan (including conduct of the site visit) with a view to providing a draft report (for 'fact checking') within around 6 – 8 weeks of submission of the draft Plan. However, as I have raised a number of questions, I must provide you with sufficient opportunity to reply. Consequentially, and dependent on when you are in a position to respond, the examination timetable may be extended. Please be assured that I will aim to mitigate any delay, should it arise, as far as is practicable. The IPe office team will seek to keep you updated on the anticipated delivery date of the draft report.

If you have any process questions related to the conduct of the examination, which you would like me to address, please do not hesitate to contact the office team in the first instance.

In the interests of transparency, may I prevail upon you to ensure that a copy of this letter is placed on the Town Council and Cheshire East Council websites.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

*Andrew Freeman*

Examiner

## ANNEX

From my initial reading of the Congleton Neighbourhood Development Plan, the supporting evidence and the representations that have been made to the Plan, I have the following questions for Congleton Town Council. I have requested the submission of responses by **Thursday 11 December 2025**, although an earlier response would be much appreciated.

Where I am requesting additional clarification, suggested text and similar, this is with a view to informing the specific terms of any relevant examiner modification(s) that I may recommend. Accordingly, all of the points set out below flow from the requirement to satisfy the Basic Conditions.

### Questions for Congleton Town Council

1. Please confirm the date on which the Regulation 14 consultation opened. Section 2.6 of the Consultation Statement says 10 October 2024 whilst publicity material refers to 14 October 2024.
2. Please confirm the reason why redesignation was sought in 2024.
3. Policy 1 – “redevelopment of previously developed land”: Is it intended that only redevelopment would be supported by this part of the policy? Would “development” be supported (ie, including re-use and new development on brownfield land, not just redevelopment)?
4. Policy 1: Would the redevelopment of previously developed land be approved throughout the neighbourhood area or just within the Congleton settlement boundary?
5. Policy 1 (and elsewhere): How is “small scale” (windfall development) to be defined?
6. Policy 1 – “local ecological networks”: Are these as shown on Map 4?
7. Policy 2 – In supporting extensions to existing homes, would the effect on the living conditions of nearby occupiers be a relevant consideration?
8. Policy 3 – consideration in accordance with policies in the Cheshire East Local Plan: What are the relevant policies?
9. Policy 4 – How is the “appropriateness” of the (type and) scale of new development to be determined?
10. Policy 5 – amenity standards within the Cheshire East Local Plan documents: For the benefit of applicants, please reference the relevant standards.
11. Policy 6 – Is there clarity over the extent of the Lower Heath local convenience shopping location?
12. Policy 6 – “established Cheshire East Local Plan retail areas”: Are these the areas referenced in Policy RET 1? Is the provision intended to apply to premises adjacent to the Town Centre Boundary of Congleton itself?
13. Policy 8: What are to be regarded as “major development proposals” and how are “sufficient” opportunities to be defined?

- 14.** Policy 9: Please provide a link to the Town Council’s corporate trees policy.
- 15.** Policy 9 – “make reference to the Cheshire Wildlife Trust work”: Please be more specific about what is required of applicants.
- 16.** Policy 10 – replacement in accordance with policies in the East Cheshire Local Plan: For clarity, please specify the policies.
- 17.** Policy 10 – reinvestment of sale assets into services: Do you consider that this can be required through development management?
- 18.** Policy 12: Please comment on the representations of the Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Board and NHS Property Services Ltd.
- 19.** Policy 13 – responding to local characteristics: An applicant will need to know what are regarded as “the local characteristics”. Are these, for example, the “Key characteristics” listed for each of the Character Areas in Section 3.4 of the Congleton Design Guidelines and Design Codes? Is this where “the local vernacular” is also described? Please reference specifically where the local vernacular is described and where the characteristics are documented.
- 20.** Policy 14 – defined character of the four conservation areas: Where is this character defined?
- 21.** Policy 15 - Congleton Landscape Character Assessment Part 2 (2020): Where is “the guidance” to be found?
- 22.** Policy 16: Please comment on the representations of McCarthy & Stone Retirement Lifestyles Ltd regarding housing meeting M4(3) standards.
- 23.** Policy 18 – protection of key views within each Landscape Character Area: “Key” views do not appear to be identified in the Congleton Landscape Character Assessment Part 2 (2020). Scores of “views” are identified, but I would not expect all of those to be the subject of Policy 18. Also, the town centre “views” in the Character Assessment do not match those shown on Map 8 in the Neighbourhood Plan. Please offer an explanation to these points. The key views, vistas, landmarks / landmark buildings and visual gateways need to be clearly identified and mapped.
- 24.** Policy 22: Applicants will need to know the geographical extent of the improvement areas, the area to which the policy would apply. Please provide plans defining the improvement areas.