



# Congleton Town Centre Plan

## Delivery Strategy, December 2008



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# 1

## **Introduction**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In March 2008 Congleton Partnership - a group comprising of representatives from Congleton Town Council, Congleton Borough Council, South East Cheshire Enterprise (SECE), businesses and community groups agreed the Congleton Town Centre Plan (TCP) to outline a vision, objectives and conceptual proposals for the town centre, which had emerged from a comprehensive Town Centre baseline assessment and issues and options consultation in November 2007. It was adopted by Congleton Borough Council as informal planning guidance in July 2008. The TCP, Baseline Report and Issues and Options Report can be viewed at <http://www.congleton-tc.gov.uk/pages.asp?PageID=88>.

At the time of writing, it was anticipated that the TCP would be taken forward by Congleton Borough Council as a statutory Area Action Plan (AAP) and it did not go into detail on delivery and policy issues. However, as a consequence of Local Government Re-organisation in which Cheshire East Council will be the principal local authority from April, 2009 and changes to regulations for the preparation of Local Development Documents it has not been possible to progress the document as an AAP in the timescales previously envisaged.

This Delivery Strategy has been prepared to set out a programme for the delivery of the TCP. It explains the key stages and mechanisms involved in taking the TCP forward and provides an indicative timetable, incorporating short, medium and long term milestones in the TCP delivery.

# 2

## **Delivery Strategy**

## 2. DELIVERY STRATEGY

### 2.1 APPROACH

This Delivery Strategy is based on the fundamental principle that the TCP will only be delivered through strong partnerships, involving Congleton Partnership, Congleton Town Council, Congleton Borough Council in the short term (and Cheshire East Council in the longer term), private sector development partners, other public sector agencies, town centre businesses and landowners.

The lead role in the delivery of the TCP will be the Congleton Partnership, and Congleton Town Council who will be the accountable body for a number of projects. Congleton Borough Council/Cheshire East Council as a local planning authority and a major landowner in the study area will be instrumental in securing public sector funding and utilising its property assets, planning and CPO powers to facilitate the overall delivery process.

The Delivery Strategy is structured as follows:

- Organisational Framework
- Planning Framework
- Viability
- Funding
- Development Process & Delivery Mechanisms
- Land Acquisition
- Suggested Project Timetable
- Progress to Date

### 2.2 ORGANISATIONAL FRAMEWORK

The implementation of any TCP requires adequate provision of human resources within an organisational framework geared up to manage change. The Congleton Partnership working with Congleton Town Council and initially Congleton Borough Council, but most importantly Cheshire East Council will be key in delivering the TCP. However, a suitable vehicle will be needed to drive the regeneration and transformation of the area. Whilst public sector land and perhaps funding may be available to pump prime the development, the majority of the investment will come from the private sector. In addition, the private sector will be able to provide their development expertise. The likely vehicle for the regeneration of the key areas will be a joint venture partnership. More information on this approach is set out later in this document.

### 2.3 PLANNING FRAMEWORK

Congleton Borough Council/Cheshire East Council will have a primary role to play aligning the TCP with the statutory policy framework to set the context for the delivery of the projects and strategies contained in the Plan.

As previously stated, it was originally intended that Congleton Borough Council would take forward the TCP as statutory Area Action Plan (AAP) and a formal component of its Local Development Framework. However, in October 2008, this process was formally halted to reflect the programme of the Cheshire East Council as set out in its Submission Draft Local Development Scheme (see below) and changes to national regulatory framework for the preparation of Local Development Frameworks (LDFs).

The Cheshire East Council will take over local government services from Congleton (as well as Macclesfield, Crewe & Nantwich Boroughs, and Cheshire County Council) on April 1, 2009 and has prepared a submission draft Local Development Scheme (LDS - a public statement of its programme for the production of Local Development Documents) for the East Cheshire area. Responsibility for the LDF process formally passed to the Shadow East Council at the end of November 2008. The LDS was submitted to the Secretary of State in on 10 December 2008 for approval.

The submitted LDS contains five Development Plan Documents for Cheshire East including a Core Strategy (programmed for adoption in 2012); A Site Allocations Document (programmed for adoption in 2013); a Middlewich Canal Corridor Area Action Plan (programmed for adoption in 2014); and a Minerals Site Allocations document (programmed for adoption in 2013). A Congleton Town Centre Area Action Plan is also included and will commence in November 2010 when the Core Strategy is at a reasonably advanced stage towards adoption (Congleton Town Centre will be defined in the Core Strategy).

If the LDS as currently drafted is approved by the Secretary of State, the TCP and subsequent component projects, briefs and strategies (including Congleton Regeneration Strategy and Market Study), which have emerged from that should be used to feed into the evidence base for the Cheshire East Core Strategy, Site Allocation and Congleton Town Centre Area Action Plan Development Plan Documents. They will provide a strategic understanding of the Town Centre where one currently does not exist and clear steer for the Cheshire East Core Strategy and Site Allocation Development Plan Documents to set out a vision and policy direction for Congleton, which can be fleshed out in the Area Action Plan.

In light of the timescales for the Core Strategy, Site Allocations Document and Congleton Town Centre AAP, it is recognised that specific policy for some projects may need to precede the full adoption of the these documents. Until the Core Strategy, Site Allocation and Congleton Town Centre AAP have been adopted, the Council will be able to use the TCP, to assist in planning policy and to commence work on the proposals outlined in the document. Although the TCP has no statutory planning status, the preparation of the document has been carried out as far as practicable, in accordance with the saved policies of the adopted Congleton Local Plan and with best practice and statutory regulations associated with the preparation of an Area Action Plan (baseline, issues and options and sustainability appraisal stages and extensive public consultation). The TCP has also been endorsed by Congleton Borough Council as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.



Planning/development briefs will be prepared for each of the key sites to be brought forward for development. The briefs will provide the necessary level of site specific detail to give prospective developers clarity on development and design requirements. They will also provide the opportunity for further consultation work with land owners and other key stakeholders. The briefs should build on the recommendations of the TCP, and set out:

- Options
- Uses/mix of uses sought;
- Infrastructure and facility requirements;
- Planning standards to be applied and the degree of flexibility;
- Layout of the development including access, parking and circulation;
- Scale, massing and height of buildings;
- Landscaping;
- Buildings to be retained;
- Design principles and criteria; and
- Off-site requirements (i.e. section 106 contributions).

It is noted that some of the allocations outlined in the TCP are not listed in the Congleton Local Plan and this will be taken into consideration during the preparation of the briefs. The Cheshire East Core Strategy, Site Allocations and Congleton Town Centre Area Action Plan Development Plan Documents will hopefully take the additional allocations into account.

In summary, Cheshire East Council will have a key role to play in facilitating the delivery of the TCP, its alignment with the statutory planning policy framework and the preparation of planning briefs for sites. The TCP sets out clearly how local communities wish to see the town centre develop and should be used for lobbying for its principles to be incorporated and facilitated in the relevant LDF documents for Cheshire East. This process will provide the context for attracting private sector developers, provide justification for public sector funding and provide a robust basis for CPO action if required.

## 2.4 VIABILITY

We have considered the utility of preparing outline financial appraisals but due to the current uncertainty and volatility in the financial and property markets and in the absence of any site investigation work, we consider that any financial appraisals carried out would be so heavily caveated that they would be of no relevance or use to either the Council or any potential developers/other interested parties.

We have however considered the two major projects within TCP to assess whether in broad terms they are likely to be viable. These proposals include a new retail development (Bridestones 2) and a major mixed use redevelopment on the Fairground site.

### **New Retail Development (Bridestones 2)**

There is developer interest in this site for a mixed use retail development and a planning application for the development of this site is currently being prepared. This retail scheme

incorporates a relocated market. Consultation on a Development Brief for the Princess Street area is currently being undertaken (to 23 January 2009) and pre-application consultation by the potential developers has also taken place. The fact that a mainstream developer is going to the expense of preparing a scheme would strongly suggest that this scheme is viable.

### **Fairground Site – Major Mixed Use Redevelopment**

This site is currently occupied by the library, a Police Station, former Council Offices and a car park. This transformational project would provide new accommodation for the library and police station together with uses which could include, offices, residential accommodation, retail development and health facilities. The redevelopment of the site presents an opportunity for significant public real improvements. The cost of a large part of the public sector uses would be borne by the public sector, although there may be some cross subsidy from new residential, office and ancillary retail on the site. The viability of this project will depend on the nature of the commercial property market at the time of commencing the project.

Our outline initial subjective appraisals at this stage show that these projects are likely to be viable and that the development should provide funding through Section 106 legal agreements to contribute to environmental improvements in the surrounding area. The Section 106 contributions will be secured in accordance with the saved policies in the adopted Congleton Local Plan and must satisfy the five tests a planning obligation has to meet, these being:

- i) relevant to planning;
- ii) necessary to make the proposed development acceptable in planning terms;
- iii) directly related to the proposed development;
- iv) fairly and reasonably related to scale and kind to the proposed development; and
- v) reasonable in all other respects.

## **2.5 FUNDING**

It is anticipated that most of the funding for the regeneration of the Town Centre will come from the private sector. The replacement of public facilities may require some contribution from the relevant authorities in addition to the use of land receipts from the private sector. Consideration will also be given to funding through Private Finance Initiatives.

There will be other schemes, mainly public realm works, which will have to be funded by the public sector, although there may be an opportunity to use Section 106 Agreements to provide an element of funding. The following is an overview of the funding sources that could be drawn upon.

There are four potential sources of public funding:

### *Europe*

The new European Structural Funds programme 2007-2013 is to focus on three new objectives: convergence, competitiveness and cooperation. Within the UK only Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly and West Wales and the Valleys qualify as “Convergence areas” – the highest priority (successor to Objective 1). The Highlands and Islands has been designated a “Statistical

Phasing Out” area with Merseyside and South Yorkshire as “Phasing – In” areas. The rest of the UK has been designated as a “Regional Competitiveness and Employment” Area (successor to Objectives 2 and 3). Congleton will fall within this programme. There will be six over-arching priorities:

- Promoting Innovation
- Tackling Barriers to Business Growth
- Sustainable Development, Production and Consumption
- Building Sustainable Communities
- Extending Employment Opportunities to all
- Developing a Skilled and Adaptable Workforce

This programme will be managed by Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) – the North West Development Agency in Congleton’s case. Funds available under the new programme have been reduced substantially (almost halved) since the last programme 2000-2007, so competition for these scarce resources will be fierce.

#### *North West Development Agency*

The North West Development Agency (NWDA), through its “single pot” funding mechanism, provides an extensive source of discretionary funding. Their main mechanisms for support are:

- To provide “gap” funding to developers and owner-occupiers for speculative and bespoke commercial developments.
- To provide assistance of up to 100% of public sector infrastructure and direct development project.
- To provide “Dereliction Aid” to the private and public sectors to cover up to 100% the eligible cost of site improvement, less the increase in land value.

Funds have already been allocated to Congleton Borough Council by the NWDA as part of the Market Town Initiative. The findings of this study and the TCP need to be used by the Council to justify further funding for the development of the key projects for the TCP. The NWDA operates a rolling three year funding programme.

#### *English Partnerships*

English Partnerships (EP), the national regeneration agency, has merged with the Housing Corporation to become the Homes and Communities Agency. To date it has had the Housing Market Renewal (HMR) Initiative as one of its main priorities. Congleton is not included within this programme. Early indications from the new Agency are that it is looking to assist appropriate schemes in Cheshire East.

#### *Congleton Borough Council/Cheshire East Council*

Like many Councils, Congleton does not have the financial resources sufficient to tackle all of its regeneration priorities and is reliant on other sources whether this be the private sector or if fortunate other public sector bodies. However where the Council owns land this can be used as a catalyst for developments with the private sector and as a means to cross subsidise public projects. It is unknown whether the new Cheshire East Council will have access to relevant

funding and whether they will deem Congleton Town Centre a priority for any funds. However, the existence of the TCP and the commitment from Cheshire East to prepare a Congleton Town Centre AAP provide Congleton Partnership with a well developed and justified case for assistance.

## 2.6 DEVELOPMENT PROCESS AND DELIVERY MECHANISMS

### Partnerships

The key to the regeneration of Congleton, we believe, lies in forming of robust and sustainable public – private partnerships. This brings together the leadership, planning powers, local knowledge and property assets of the public sector partners together with the development experience and investment potential of the private sector. There are several ways, in which development can be taken forward; the most appropriate approach is dependent on the nature of ownerships and other complexities facing the site in question. These three approaches are:

- *Private Led*  
Sites where private land owners can, under the guidance of a detailed planning brief, take forward land assembly and the development process themselves.
- *Public Asset Based*  
Sites that are in public ownership and can be taken forward quickly to the private sector and delivered through a development agreement.
- *Public-Private Partnership*  
Sites where the complexities of land ownership are likely to necessitate a combined public/private approach to acquiring and if necessary going through the Compulsory Purchase process to assemble the site before development can take place.

### Planning and Development Briefs

Under each of the three approaches, planning and development briefs need to be prepared for the key sites being brought forward for development. The briefs will provide the necessary level of site specific detail to give prospective developers clarity on development and design requirements. They will also provide the opportunity for further consultation work with land owners and other key stakeholders. The briefs should build on the recommendations of the TCP and set out the criteria listed in Section 2.3 above. The first development brief related to the TCP is presently under preparation and is detailed in Section 2.9.

CBC/Cheshire East Council has the key role to play in giving the TCP vision, objectives and projects planning status and for the preparation of planning briefs for the sites. Establishing a clear policy framework for the plan will be a critical early action and will set the scene for attracting private sector developers.

## Selecting a Development Partner

This process is applicable either where the Council is seeking a developer to deliver a scheme on wholly owned public land or a private sector partner to assist it assemble a site and develop out an agreed scheme. In broad terms the Council should pursue the following course of action:

- 1 Prepare a development brief, based on the TCP and statutory planning policy framework, along the lines set out above;
- 2 Prepare “due diligence” information on site for developers: e.g. land ownership/title, ground conditions, planning status, etc;
- 3 Advertise development opportunity widely. This is likely to require an entry in the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU);
- 4 Choose development partner based on financial offer and quality of scheme;
- 5 Enter development agreement;
- 6 Developer/Partnership to seek necessary permissions;
- 7 Assemble the site, using compulsory purchase powers if necessary;
- 8 Commence development.

## Timescales

The component project timetable (Section 2.8 and Appendix 1) has been prepared to outline the overall programme for the implementation of the TCP. The TCP does not have the ability or intention of setting a rigid development framework and the preparation of the TCP has always stressed that delays or failure to deliver a specific component project should not undermine the broader strategy of regenerating Congleton Town Centre. Indeed it may be that alternative, as yet unimaginable, component projects emerge over time that tie into the Vision and Objectives for the Town Centre (it is understood, for example that there is an emerging body of opinion that the provision of an Art Centre should be an aim for the Cultural Quarter). It is vital that such innovative and ambitious ideas that come forward in due course are not disregarded. Equally it is vital that a long-term strategy is followed however, and that the rather ad hoc nature of previous development patterns is not replicated.

At this stage the timetable is indicative and the precise timing of project implementation will be subject to considerable variation. The timetable does however begin to express project priorities. In particular there are clearly three key development proposals in the TCP of such a scale that they can be considered catalysts for the achievement of many of the other component projects, and perhaps therefore be recognised as the only components that failure to deliver would distinctively weaken the achievement of the Vision and Objectives. They are:

- Project HC2 – New Retail Development
- Project CQ1 – Fairground Site – Major Mixed Use Redevelopment
- Congleton Regeneration Strategy

These projects are detailed in the TCP alongside all the other component projects.

## 2.7 LAND ACQUISITION

Congleton Borough Council/Cheshire East Council is in a fortunate position in owning land within the TCP boundary. Through its land ownership, the Council will be in a position to exert more control on future development and if necessary will be able to attract a private sector partner to assist in acquiring other sites and delivering particular projects.

- Acquisition by agreement  
The objective of Congleton Borough Council/Cheshire East Council should be to commence assembling these key sites and to achieve this through agreement with existing landowners.
- Acquisition by CPO  
If it appears unlikely that Congleton Borough Council/Cheshire East Council will be able to obtain control of all the land required consideration will have to be given to the use of CPO powers under the Planning Act.

## 2.8 SUGGESTED PROJECT TIMETABLE

Appendix 1 provides a suggested timescale for delivering the component projects that together comprise the TCP. Some components, such as the Market Study and Regeneration Strategy have already begun. Section 2.9 provides more detail on the work being undertaken at this time to support the TCPs delivery.

*Please note that the timetable is highly indicative and simply provided to guide rather than formally affix dates.*

## 2.9 PROGRESS TO DATE

A number of the TCP projects are already underway and their status is outlined in this Report for the purpose of clarity.

### **The Congleton Regeneration Strategy**

The TCP identified the need for the broader urban area of Congleton to be analysed physically and economically, similar to how the Town Centre has been. In conjunction the Regeneration Strategy and TCP will form a coherent analysis and approach to the future development of the Town of Congleton. The strategy also underpins 'Congleton Renaissance' the Borough Council's Economic Development and Tourism Strategy produced in 2007.

The Baseline Report for the Regeneration Strategy has now been completed. Unlike the development of the Town Centre, where the vision of a busier, more vibrant Centre with broader retail and leisure choice appeals to virtually all stakeholders, and the only debate is *how* to make happen, out of Centre issues cause much more debate. The key questions that have arisen both

from primary and secondary research are – does Congleton have enough employment land? If not, where should new development occur?

If it has, why is out-commuting higher here than any other Cheshire town? Is Congleton's traditional reliance on a significant number of manufacturing firms a weakness in a changing global economy? Or are long roots and attachments to the Town an advantage not seen in many other places?

Perhaps the most overwhelming subject that consultees agreed on however was that indecision and debate had cost Congleton in the recent past, and opportunities had been missed:

The Baseline Report includes many findings, on which the Actions will be built. However the most notable findings include:

- Congleton's economic development will be constrained without the delivery of quality and sufficient employment land in the Town;
- The delivery of many aspirational elements of the TCP are also deeply entwined with the need for broader economic development for the Town;
- Many existing land allocations in and around Congleton have either been taken up by housing development or are proving likely to only be viable if developed for residential or mixed-use purposes;
- This has occurred as some planning-led allocations for employment have been made for justifiable reasons, but have failed to recognise commercial reality, and the non-development of these allocations has at times been equated to a lack of demand;
- In reality demand, and confidence in speculative development on the basis of this demand, does exist – it is simply very difficult to quantify;
- Government-led financial assistance to industry is not as favourable in Congleton as in some neighbouring areas;
- The west and north of Congleton are the two general areas that offer the most logical long-term expansion space for all forms of development. Estimated environmental impacts to the north generally appear to be more negative;
- A new site to the west of the Town and/or the extension of Radnor Park are the most high profile options, which are also most likely to be able to deliver the greatest long-term economic benefits;
- There is a requirement for further assessment of the traffic impacts of a major new employment development on Congleton;
- South East Cheshire Enterprise has been an important driver for the Borough-wide economy and clarity is needed on the future of its role in the Cheshire East set-up;
- There is investment interest in the Town, with a strong local business base willing to contribute support to good initiatives. Skilled workers live in and around the Town who could be utilised if facilities exist and there is an untapped 'grey' economy;
- Congleton businesses have to become more pro-active in establishing links with local secondary schools and exploring the emerging laws on apprenticeships.

The final strategy is anticipated at the end of 2008/early 2009.



## Congleton Market Study

During the preparation of the Issues and Options Report in late 2007 it became apparent that stakeholders in Congleton faced a potentially difficult situation with regard to the future of Congleton Market. The market service within Congleton Town Centre is currently privately operated by City Markets and operates every Tuesday and Saturday from the Bridestone Centre – a major shopping precinct – in the heart of the Town Centre. There are 11 indoor stalls and 84 outdoor stalls (current trader levels are well below this capacity). The Market is accessed via Princess Street at ground level; or via external staircases from Victoria Street and the Bridestone Centre. It occupies a site owned by Congleton Borough Council.

At no time was the role of the Market in Congleton's future under threat – Congleton is rightly renowned as a 'market town' and there is overwhelming support for the retention of the Market at the heart of the Town Centre. However, Congleton Town Centre is subject to a number of existing significant development proposals, and further future change is anticipated in light of the TCP's proposals to revitalise the Town Centre's retail, leisure and civic offer. It was agreed at the Issues and Options Stage by the majority of respondents, and the findings of the Baseline analyses, that the Market is failing to maximise its potential. It is presently located in an isolated site that lacks visibility and character. On non-market days the site is empty and under-used further undermining user's poor perceptions of the space. Due to its concealed nature market traders have reported concerns over misuse of the site throughout the night that impacts negatively on their stall set-up the following morning.

Given the under-performance of the Market and the pressure emerging on its future the Town's key stakeholders, including the Borough and Town Councils, and City Markets, recognised that a unique – and critical – opportunity existed to evaluate the Market's future. To this end an independent market specialist, New Market Solutions (NMS), was appointed on 8<sup>th</sup> April 2008 by Congleton Borough Council. NMS's remit was to:

- (a) Secure the long-term viability of Congleton Market as a sustainable retailing enterprise, through retaining the market ethos, broadening the customer base, and adding value to Congleton Town Centre;
- (b) Determine the most suitable long-term location for both the indoor and outdoor elements of the Market in light of emerging development proposals in the Town Centre, maintaining full appreciation of the need to engage traders and Market management in a manner that does not undermine their commitment or confidence in the process;
- (c) Advise on how the Market can seek to improve its produce offer, format, presentation, and operational efficiency in order to compete with recognised best practice elsewhere in the UK;
- (d) Ensure that where possible emerging proposals for the indoor and outdoor elements of the Market are in line with current local and regional planning and regeneration policy. Any recommended deviation from existing policy must be clearly highlighted to the Council with sound justification being provided.



- (e) Ensure that proposals for the indoor and outdoor elements of the Market are as far as possible consistent with the ongoing Town Plan and Area Action Plan processes and other existing town centre initiatives.

### **Princess Street Development Brief**

A recurring theme throughout early Town Plan stakeholder engagement was that whilst Congletonians were eager to see their Town Centre progress by bringing in a greater range of facilities there was concern that such developments may be detrimental to the appearance of the Town, with examples from the relatively recent past such as the Bridestones Centre, Council Offices and Library widely being cited as evidence of a lack of respect for the Town's traditional urban fabric.

With Congleton Borough Council already in discussion with a developer over the potential creation of a major new mixed-use scheme including retail at and around the Princess Street site adjoining the existing Bridestones Centre, it was felt necessary to ensure that the expectations of the public were met in terms of the physical quality of any new development, whilst also recognising that the private sector cannot realistically be expected to wait until the full adoption of the Local Development Framework to receive detailed guidance to inform any future planning applications. Consequently Congleton Borough Council appointed consultants to prepare a site development brief for the Princess Street site, with the intention being two-fold; firstly to ensure the best quality development takes place at Princess Street, which catalyses wider positive change that the Local Development Framework can subsequently guide; and secondly to set quality of design parameters that can eventually form the basis of assessment for all future applications in Congleton Town Centre. The Princess Street Development brief has been published for consultation until 23 January 2009 and a separate pre-application consultation by the potential developers was undertaken in December. The, the Princess Street Development Brief can be a template for other key development sites emerging from the Town Plan in due course.

# 3

## **Planning Policy Direction**

## 3. PLANNING POLICY DIRECTION

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The submitted Cheshire East LDS contains five Development Plan Documents for Cheshire East: a Core Strategy which will set out the overarching Vision, Strategy and Objectives for Spatial Development of East Cheshire and may include strategic sites; A Site Allocations Document, which will contain detailed policies and proposals to deliver and guide land allocated for specific uses in accordance; a Minerals Site Allocations document which will contain the detailed development control policies and allocations for minerals development where applicable. It also contains Area Action Plans for Congleton Town Centre and for the Middlewich Canal Corridor, both to be commenced when the Core Strategy is sufficiently addressed. This section describes how planning policy can be influenced by the TCP.

### 3.2 USING THE TOWN PLAN TO INFORM THE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

Creating a Core Strategy for a new, enlarged Borough encompassing the diverse communities of Congleton, Macclesfield and Crewe & Nantwich will be a challenge for the Cheshire East Council.

In planning policy terms, the TCP Baseline Report and Issues and Options work identified a lack of clarity over Congleton's strategic role within the Region and the new Cheshire East Council area. The TCP provides the strategic understanding of Congleton Town Centre's role that has previously been limited.

The TCP Vision is that *'Congleton Town Centre grows to re-establish a greater role within Cheshire, to dominate the Borough and become more competitive with rival centres such as Crewe and Macclesfield without aiming to directly match or supersede them'*.

The TCP proposes a series of actions that, in brief summary:

- Seek to reduce out-commuting by Congleton residents for employment purposes by providing new and refurbished office space at the heart of the Town Centre;
- Improve the Town Centre's retail and leisure offer to ensure it does not continue to stagnate and a once vibrant Market Town becomes a dormitory town;
- Diversify the Town Centre's housing offer to increase town centre living and therefore local security and footfall;
- Grow the Town Centre without challenging Macclesfield or Crewe's strategic roles within Cheshire East;
- Grow the Town Centre's economic capacity through the use of brownfield sites only;
- Recommend further studies beyond the Town Centre boundary to determine how the remainder of the Congleton urban area can similarly seek to reduce out-commuting and allow indigenous business to grow without having to move away from the Town (the Congleton Regeneration Study is currently underway – see Section 2.9).

In relation to planning policy for Congleton it is vital that the Cheshire East Local Development Framework Core Strategy and Congleton Town Centre Area Action Plan recognises the Regional Spatial Strategy's inclusion of Congleton in the Manchester City Region.

### ***Retail and Leisure Policy Direction***

Planning Policy Statement 6, the national guidance note on planning for Town Centre uses (retail, leisure, offices and cultural facilities), states regional and local planning policy 'should focus development in, and plan for the expansion of, existing centres as appropriate, and at the local level identify appropriate sites in development plan documents', which is what the TCP intends to do. The TCP is based on the premise that Town Centre uses should be focused on the existing Town Centre – a logical proposition but one that has not always held true in Congleton or many other towns – and it has earmarked the sites where these uses will be best placed.

A criteria based retail policy for Congleton should be set out in the Core Strategy and Congleton Town Centre Area Action Plan, that recognises that the Town Centre will be the main focus for development and regeneration, outlining the sequential approach to development in the Town Centre – reflecting the TCP allocation of sites for particular uses. It is clear that even within the Town Centre retail uses should be focused on the core areas – Fairground Site, Princess Street, existing retail area (in and around Swan Bank, Mill/Bridge/High/Lawton/Market Streets) – and that retail development elsewhere in the Town Centre should be only of an ancillary nature to other uses. These core retail areas should be defined in planning policy as the Primary Retail Area, and therefore sequentially preferable to other parts of the Town Centre, which in turn will be preferable to development beyond the TCP boundary in the Congleton urban area. Planning policy should ensure that any retail developments outside the Town Centre do not negatively impact on the vitality and viability of the Town Centre.

The Policy should seek to maintain and strengthen the retail role of Cheshire East's other Town, District and Local Neighbourhood Centres.

Leisure uses by the nature of their diversity require a little more flexibility and should be focused in and around retail areas and at the designated Leisure Hub around the existing Leisure Centre and Hankinson's Field.

### ***Residential Development Policy Direction***

The TCP outlines the development of a number of sites for residential uses or a mix of uses including residential elements. For the purposes of the TCP it is apparent that proposals should respect the annual average provision of a minimum 300 dwellings 2003-2021 per annum set out in published RSS and the policies of the adopted Congleton Local Plan, at least until further analysis is undertaken by the North West Regional Leaders Forum (4NW) and Cheshire East Council in due course.

The TCP should be used to inform the Core Strategy and Site Allocations Development Plan Documents and the Congleton Town Centre Area Action Plan. However, it is noted that some

allocations outlined in the TCP are not listed in the Congleton Local Plan. Until the Core Strategy and Site Allocations Development Plan documents are adopted development proposals should have regard to the established statutory planning policy framework.

The Town Centre should be a primary focus for development within the Congleton urban area. Future LDF policies should encourage the conversion of upper floors where these are not needed as ancillary space to the retail use, and the conversion of former industrial premises where these are unlikely to be viable for future employment purposes. It is anticipated that the delivery of a proportion of affordable housing units will be required in line with existing Congleton Borough Council planning policy (SPD6 until superseded by a new Cheshire East Housing Policy).

### ***Employment Allocations Policy Direction***

The TCP does not recommend any industrial uses for the Town Centre, nor the development of any employment uses on any greenfield sites within the Town Centre. The Town Centre's character and economic health are clearly best served by the provision of quality new or refurbished office space, for which demand exists (as proven in the Baseline Stage of the Town Plan process). Whilst the quantum of office development and nature of users will to a large extent be determined by the commercial market, the TCP has indicated a number of sites that are best suited to employment uses, or a mix of uses including office space. All proposed allocations either involve maximising the potential of a mixed-use scheme anchored by some other use to provide employment or the renewal of ageing industrial premises to provide more commercially viable space which also benefits the character of a town centre. Effectively there will be no overall gain in the quantity of employment land but an upgrade in employment land quality.

Specific policies should be included for sites which are identified for employment and/or mixed use development within the Town Centre to support its viability and to ensure a range of employment sites to meet demand. The appropriate types of uses should be prescribed though it is considered unlikely that any form of new industrial uses will be suitable for the Town Centre. Indeed, policy should require that employment development does not have an adverse impact on the amenity of neighbouring residential properties.

### ***Design Policy Direction***

Proposals should conform with the saved 'General Requirement' and design policies of the Congleton Local Plan. Future Cheshire East policy guidance on design should cover such issues as scale, massing, materials, colours, views and local character. It should not seek to be too prescriptive but ensure that design and materials are of a quality to enhance the Town Centre. The proposed Development Briefs, Shopfront Design Guidance and Conservation Area Appraisal within the TCP should be used in informing this policy.

### ***Environmental Issues Policy Direction***

It is not the intention of any TCP allocation to reduce the quality or quantity of public open space in Congleton Town Centre. A Core Strategy and Town Centre AAP policy should be included that encourages healthy lifestyles through improved access to physical activity through the retention and creation of open space. This Policy would ensure that when any proposal comes forward that does result in loss or change of public open space it is only permitted if absolutely necessary for the wider benefit of the Town Centre and if alternative space of equal or superior quality is provided elsewhere in the Town Centre.

Policy guidance should set out requirements for high quality landscaping across the Town Centre, with particular emphasis on encouraging any form of landscaping that reduces the visual and noise impact of Mountbatten Way.

### ***Transport and Parking Policy Direction***

The Policy Direction for the Core Strategy, Site Allocations and Congleton Town Centre Area Action Plan Development Plan Documents should reflect the findings of the Car Parking Strategy identified in the Plan.

Policies should be included which outline adequate parking standards for each development within the Town Centre boundary. Where dedicated car parking facilities are not provided it may be appropriate for developers to contribute towards the provision of public parking facilities within the Town Centre by way of a Section 106 contribution.

Appropriate policies regarding the production of Transport Assessments and Travel Plans should also be included. Policies regarding servicing and access should also be included.

### ***Conservation Area and Heritage***

A Policy should be developed which recognises the role of the Conservation Area, the local character, distinctiveness, built heritage and historic environment. This would be informed by the Conservation Area and Buildings at Risk Assessments proposed in the TCP.




### ***Section 106 Contributions Policy Direction***

The Cheshire East Local Development Scheme includes a Planning Obligations SPD which would expand upon the policies contained in the adopted saved Local Plans. The SPD should require developers to enter into Section 106 Agreements to contribute financially to the delivery of public realm and infrastructure within Congleton Town Centre. This would be in line with national guidance regarding the use of planning obligations.

Any future policy direction should take account of other procedural changes consequent upon the Planning Act 2008. This would include the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), which will allow the Authority to introduce a charge on development for infrastructure provision. The CIL is likely to form part of the LDF and will be subject to examination.

## Appendix 1: Indicative Timescales for Preferred Options Component Projects

Key

-  Project Feasibility/Site Assembly/Planning Approvals/Guidance Preparation
-  Detailed Design and Mobilisation (where relevant)
-  Construction/Implementation (where relevant)

COMPONENT PROJECTS	INDICATIVE TIMESCALE (YEARS FROM 2008)										COMMENTS
	-1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9+		
SP1: Public Realm Strategy	Light Blue	Cyan	Cyan	Cyan	Cyan	Cyan	Cyan	Cyan	Cyan	Cyan	Ongoing process, reviewing each project's impact on, and potential to contribute to, an agreed public realm strategy.
SP2: Mountbatten Way Improvements		Light Blue									Precursor to more detailed works under LS5
SP3: Riverside Walk and Park		Light Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue							Strategic guidance to be produced to inform schemes that can contribute to implementation in due course.
SP4: Car Parking Strategy		Light Blue									To be continually updated – will be heavily influenced by detail design of HC1, HC2 & CQ1
SP5: Conservation Area	Light Blue	Light Blue	Cyan								Ongoing (started November 2008, complete March 2009)
SP6: Buildings at Risk Assessment	Light Blue	Light Blue									Done
SP7: Shopfront Design Guidance		Light Blue	Light Blue								To be adopted within the statutory planning framework and inform future development. No shopfront Design SPD currently progressed by Cheshire East.
SP8: Future of Congleton Market Study	Light Blue										Study undertaken in mid-2008 and now feeding into Local Development Framework.
SP9: Regeneration Strategy (wider urban area)	Light Blue	Light Blue									Study to co-ordinate Town Centre proposals with urban area's requirements.
HC1: Remodelling of Bridestone Centre	Light Blue	Dark Blue									HC1 influenced by final detail of HC2 and findings of SP8
HC2: New Retail Development at Princess Street	Cyan	Dark Blue									HC2 to integrate findings of SP8 and influence SP4 & SP7
HC3: Antrobus Street Public Realm Improvement						Light Blue	Cyan				Relatively low priority therefore timescale is loosely estimated
HC4: Bridge Street, Little Street & Duke Street Reinvigoration				Light Blue	Cyan	Dark Blue					Minor building and environmental works to upgrade public perception
CQ1: Fairground Site – Major Mixed Use Redevelopment	Light Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue							Development brief to be prepared. Site will be developed in phases
CQ2: Market Square – Creation of New Civic Space		Light Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue							Exact nature to be determined by development at CQ1
CQ3: Museum Expansion					Light Blue	Cyan	Dark Blue				
CQ4: Town Hall Square –											

Creation of New Civic Space											
CQ5: High Street Public Realm Improvement											Minor building and environmental works to upgrade public perception
LS1: Lawton Street Public Realm Improvement											Minor building and environmental works to upgrade public perception
LS2: Worrall Street – Major Mixed Use Redevelopment											May come forward earlier depending on national market conditions.
LS3: Willow Street Gateway – Gateway Enhancements											Minor works to encourage private sector to lead comprehensive redevelopment (LH3)
LS4: Bromley Road – Residential Development											Highly influenced by market conditions. Phasing needs to complement meeting of housing targets across the Borough.
LS5: Mountbatten Way Reconfiguration											
LS6: Park Street & Bank Street – Development Opportunity											
LH1: Leisure Centre Upgrade											
LH2: Outdoor Water Play Area											
LH3: Willow Street – Employment Development Opportunity Site											
LH4: Daneside Theatre Square – Creation of Small Civic Space											







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