

# CHESHIRE WEST AND CHESTER CLIMATE EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLAN

## CHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY RESPONSE

### Summary

- The historic environment in all its forms is threatened by climate change but can also help us to mitigate it and create better places to live. The knowledge of local heritage societies should therefore be sought in these consultations.
- The Council already has detailed studies and strategies to address some of the problems of transport and land-use adaptation; these should be built upon.
- We support the Council's aims regarding transport and draw attention to our previous responses on the subject. Compact historical settlements can more easily be adapted for active travel than modern ones designed around motor transport.
- In view of the embedded carbon footprint of construction, historic buildings should be reused whenever possible.
- Tree-planting in small clumps and hedge- and mere/pond restoration as suggested by existing strategies will sequester carbon and restore landscape character. Detailed mapping is required to ensure that the construction of PV array panels and planting does not damage landscape character and avoids archaeologically sensitive areas. More thought needs to be given to the marginal land on urban fringes.
- To implement these changes sensitively to deliver the maximum public benefits will require proactive, highly-skilled planning.

### Detail

#### **1.0 The Role of the Historic Environment in Combating Climate Change**

1.1 Climate change and its drivers are a threat to all aspects of our lives, including the historic environment (buildings and monuments, archaeological sites and landscapes). Conversely, intelligent maintenance and restoration of built heritage and historic landscape character can play an important role in the mitigation of climate change and in 'making our neighbourhoods even better places to call home', as we indicated in our response to the Council's *Heritage Strategy Approach* (October 2020). For that reason, local heritage societies are well placed to advise, and CWaC should actively seek to involve them in its consultations on climate change.

1.2 In this response we focus on transport, building adaptation, land-use and the need for more proactive spatial planning. The Council showed its awareness of the need for change on spatial planning in its 'Play your Part' consultation and has had well informed strategies (referred to below) on transport and land-use for up to ten years. The emphasis should now be on reviewing these strategies, refining them and on putting them into practice rather than on going back to basics. External funding should support the implementation of existing, considered strategies and schemes, rather than new schemes being devised and implemented in a hurry to take advantage of ephemeral grants.

## 2.0 Transport

- 2.1 Section 4.0 of the Plan on transport sets out the need to reduce the distances travelled by private car, use more public transport, cycle and walk more, improve digital infrastructure and increase the number of EVs. In particular it states (4.1, page 19): 'moving past using the number of vehicles as a measure of success, and towards broader public satisfaction with our places and spaces'. Section 4.5, page 20, refers to 'cycling and active travel infrastructure that is designed around usability, that is joined up, and which feels direct, logical and intuitive. This will be achieved by creating segregated cycling infrastructure, re-balancing the street towards equal prioritisation of pedestrians, cyclists and cars, and supporting electric vehicle/low carbon vehicle infrastructure.'
- 2.2 In our response to the 'Walk, Ride, Thrive' consultation ([https://chesterarchaeolsoc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/CAS\\_PlanConsult20\\_CWaC\\_WalkRideThrive\\_PC\\_Comments\\_V02.pdf](https://chesterarchaeolsoc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/CAS_PlanConsult20_CWaC_WalkRideThrive_PC_Comments_V02.pdf)) we put forward a wide-ranging, integrated and practical scheme for traffic reduction and simplification and for the construction of cycle lanes in Chester that went a long way to meeting these aims; it was consistent with the DfT Local Transport Note 1/20 on cycle infrastructure design and was consistent with the established *One City Plan* and *Chester Public Realm Design Guide*. Traffic reduction, especially on the Inner Ring Road, would have the welcome side-effect of making the whole of the historic city centre within the Walls a more attractive place to live and explore. We first addressed some of these issues in our response to the 'Play your Part' consultation ([CAS\\_Consult19\\_CWaC\\_PlayYourPart\\_PC\\_Comments\\_V01.pdf](https://chesterarchaeolsoc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/CAS_Consult19_CWaC_PlayYourPart_PC_Comments_V01.pdf) ([chesterarchaeolsoc.org.uk](https://chesterarchaeolsoc.org.uk)), and noted that a House of Commons Science and Technology Select Committee Report (22-08-19) observed that 'Electric vehicles are not a panacea; ultimately the number of vehicles on the road needs to be reduced'.
- 2.3 The centre of Chester has the advantage of being an ancient settlement that was designed for people, not motor vehicles; it thus has great potential to become more attractive for active travel. Our immediate challenge is to mitigate some of the damage done to its historic form in the 1960s to accommodate motor traffic and to stop further damage through the construction of further outmoded traffic infrastructure, most obviously the seven-storey car park foreseen for the Northgate Phase I site. It is in the highest degree ironical that a council that has declared a 'climate emergency' and set out the aims listed in para 2.1 above should be replacing a green space with a large MSCP in order to replace an underground car park that already exists and could be upgraded to modern standards.
- 2.4 At the start of 2020, Liverpool announced plans to reduce traffic on the Strand ([liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/major-changes-strand-approved-your-17626149](https://liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/major-changes-strand-approved-your-17626149)); York plans to ban non-essential traffic from within its city walls (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-york-north-yorkshire-50957470>); in Birmingham there is an aspiration to remove through traffic from the city centre and redevelop existing car parks (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-51088499>); and in Manchester there is discussion of removing up to half of city-centre parking (<https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/end-driving-town-almost-half-18990496>). Thus, what we propose for Chester is hardly revolutionary.

2.5 Residents elsewhere in the borough will be able to advise on how to make their own settlements more practical and attractive for walking and cycling, although those extensively rebuilt or expanded to be dependent on cars (eg Winsford, Ellesmere Port) may be difficult to adapt. Future planning decisions should attempt to ameliorate these problems.

### **3.0 Building Re-use**

3.1 It is not just historic neighbourhoods designed before the motor age that can help mitigate climate change. Because of the high embedded costs of construction, old buildings should be retained, appropriately and sympathetically adapted and modernised whenever possible rather than replaced.

### **4.0 Land-Use Adaptation**

4.1 Key documents to inform actions on this subject (section 8) should be CWaC's 2016 *Landscape Strategy* (<https://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/residents/planning-and-building-control/total-environment/landscape-character-assessment.aspx>) and . *Landscape Sensitivity Study* (<http://consult.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/file/3910756>), both of which are evidence base documents for the *Local Plan Part Two*. The former identifies sixteen landscape character types in the borough, explains the key characteristics of each type, their natural and cultural qualities (including heritage), the forces for change and – importantly – sets out guidelines for their future management, while the latter suggests the potentially least damaging areas for the construction of wind turbines and PV panel arrays ('solar farms'). These character types would benefit from being shown as a layer on the Council webmapping site (<https://maps.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/cwac/webmapping>) that can be overlain on the heritage information already there; the latter information should be upgraded to include the 2007 *Historic Landscape Characterisation Final Report* (<http://www.cheshirearchaeology.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/CheshireHLCFinalReportWeb.pdf>) and the Cheshire Aerial Investigation and Mapping Project.

4.2 The potential visual impact of wind turbines and PV panel arrays on landscape character is immediately obvious. However, in addition, although the latter may be classed as temporary structures and need not impact on hedges etc, access roads, soil stripping and cable trenches would irretrievably damage archaeological earthworks and fragile subsurface remains. For this reason, areas with such remains should be avoided whenever possible and those chosen should be subject to archaeological assessment and, if appropriate, field evaluation, and development should only take place on the principle of 'no detriment' to heritage assets. Overlaying detailed suggested sites/areas for these installations on maps showing landscape character and archaeology would highlight potential conflicts and might also give an idea of the amount of power that might be generated.

4.3 It is particularly important to highlight the well preserved ridge and furrow earthworks that survive in the borough, especially in its southern part. These earthworks, formed by medieval ploughing techniques, are significant for their contribution to present-day as well as to historic landscape character and to our understanding of social and agricultural organisation during the medieval period. Their retention is vital for our archaeological and historical heritage but they are afforded no statutory protection and, as noted, would effectively be destroyed by the sort of works described above.

- 4.4 The Plan targets pasture for woodland creation but also highlights the need to maintain landscape character. It is in this pastureland in particular that the ridge and furrow earthworks referred to above are to be found. Historically the proportion of woodland cover in the borough has been low, with many trees traditionally being planted in hedgerows and small clumps, and has declined further over the past century. Fortunately the *Landscape Strategy* makes numerous recommendations as to how the proportion of vegetation can be increased, for example by expanding existing woodland, planting of trees in field corners and re-planting hedgerows, while respecting archaeological landscapes and sites and restoring landscape character. These recommendations should again be mapped in detail against archaeology to minimise damage, and it would be interesting to know what area of woodland would thus be gained. The borough is also rich in meres, mosses and field ponds, all of which have an important part to play in carbon sequestration and should be maintained and restored. We suggest that maintaining historic and archaeologically significant landscape is a key public benefit. It typically also sequesters more carbon than modern farming methods. The replacement of the EU Common Agricultural Policy payments by payments to farmers for delivering wider public benefits may make this strategy easier to implement.
- 4.5 It is surprising that the Plan does not make reference to Natural England's National Landscape Character Area 62, the Sandstone Ridge. This major landscape feature, which underpins a variety of different habitats, is the location of six vulnerable prehistoric hillforts and endangered sites extending the full length of the borough. Joined-up thinking that links landscape, habitat, and heritage within a sense of a special place can help to address both local and wider issues and inform many of the proposals in this Plan.
- 4.6 A weakness of the *Landscape Strategy* seems to be its lack of treatment of marginal land on the edges of settlements, which could be managed more positively. An example is the farmland south of Saughall Road, sandwiched between Chester, Blacon and the Greyhound Retail Park. This is the former bed of the Dee and is now designated a flood water storage area. Although still cultivated, it is partly under water for many months of the year. With little agricultural loss this could be turned into proper wetland, increasing biodiversity, helping carbon sequestration and improving the visual quality of the landscape.
- 4.7 In terms of urban green infrastructure, in our response to the 'Walk, Ride, Thrive' consultation we suggested that two lanes of the Chester Inner Ring Road should be turned into cycleways and greened; this could include tree planting. We have also argued that the proposed site of the Northgate MSCP should revert to a pocket park and that, in keeping with the city's medieval character, there should be more tree-planting in backland areas within the City Walls.
- 5.0 Proactive Spatial Planning**
- 5.1 The Plan correctly observes that some desirable measures are beyond the current powers of local authorities. We consider that this is especially true of spatial planning, where the authority's role now seems to be largely reactive. The opportunity signalled by the government's White Paper on planning reform, *Planning for the Future*, to increase the capacity of, and re-skill, local government planning departments and for them to take a more proactive role should be seized. This will be necessary for the

changes discussed above to be implemented sensitively so as to create 'broader public satisfaction with our places and spaces' rather than in a crude, purely functional and destructive way. Recent decades have seen the 'dis-integration' of towns, with former central industrial (and now retail) areas being given over to residential use, and industry, commerce and retail being moved to separate out-of-town parks. This has increased the number, length and complexity of journeys required, which are intended to be made by car (witness the amount of parking provided). This process should be reversed so far as practical, even though it will take decades. For example, shops or supermarkets selling a wide range of everyday necessities of good quality and at reasonable prices should be encouraged in suburbs, within walking distance, or on well established bus routes and there is no reason why these should not flourish (eg Hoole). See our response to the Council's High Streets Commission consultation, para 2.4.1 ([https://chesterarchaeolsoc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/CAS\\_PlanConsult20\\_CWaC\\_HighStreetCommission\\_PC\\_Comments\\_V03.pdf](https://chesterarchaeolsoc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/CAS_PlanConsult20_CWaC_HighStreetCommission_PC_Comments_V03.pdf)).

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