



SANDBACH TOWN COUNCIL

CONTEXTUAL STATEMENT
CORPORATE STRATEGY 2022-2025

A PROSPEROUS TOWN

Sandbach Parish consists of 5 distinct settlements with green buffers between. It includes a characterful historic town centre, identified in the Cheshire East Local Plan as a key service centre, which supports the surrounding agricultural area and rural population.

Sandbach was one of the Cheshire East's mid-performing centres in terms of visitors in August 2019. Comparatively, it has been less affected by the pandemic than surrounding centres, suggesting many working from home were choosing to shop locally.

Sandbach has witnessed significant housing growth over the last decade, raising concerns about the ability of the Town's infrastructure and public services to accommodate the increased demands.

The largest employer is Cheshire East Council at Westfields located on the perimeter of the town centre. The main industrial employment area is situated at the Springvale Industrial Estate in Ettiley village, with smaller employment areas in Wheelock village and business units in Elworth. Significant mixed-use development is proposed at the 29-acre Capricorn Business Park adjacent to J17 of the M6 motorway, however this has not yet been able to be brought to fruition.

Sandbach has lost much of its previous industry. This and the excellent transport available including proximity to the M6 motorway and mainline rail services at Crewe, has meant that the town has become a commuter town.

Sandbach benefits from a well-represented convenience retail offer including a Waitrose and Aldi supermarket, and weekly Thursday Market; together with a strong representation of independent retailers, food and beverage operators; and a low shop vacancy rate. The town also plays host to a range of regular events such as niche markets, festivals, open-air concerts and fairs. Sandbach also has an important civic role with Cheshire East Council offices and a historic Town Hall. Other visitor attractions include Sandbach Park, Wheelock Rail Trail and the Trent and Mersey Canal. Beyond the villages that make up Sandbach is open countryside and much used public rights of way.

The Town benefits from a train station which lies a 25 min walk away from centre and free town centre parking. The historic town centre is very compact and walkable. Sandbach suffers from a lack of integrated transport links, particularly to the station and traffic and congestion, significantly that passing through the town centre.

Whilst the scale of office use within the town centre is limited, the importance of retail, leisure and tourism as an employer and economic driver in Sandbach is well recognised. The pandemic has demonstrated to many organisations that "remote" or "hybrid" working offer tremendous benefits and Sandbach plans to take advantage of this new reality by making sure the digital infrastructure is there to support both co-creation office space and start up office provision. There are however considered to be too many fast-food outlets on the High Street.

There are estimated to be over 10,000 Sandbach residents in employment, with more than 50% commuting out of the Town (twice as many as commute in). A majority of people coming in to work in Sandbach come from

surrounding locations such as Middlewich or Crewe. Unemployment is under 2%, well below the national average.

A SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT

Sandbach as we have seen, has five distinct settlements and the green gaps between them are cherished locally, as is the rural countryside consisting of prime dairy and arable farmland, which surrounds the parish. These are always under pressure by the demand for further housing sites, yet the substantial growth over the last decade makes them ever more important if the character of the Town is to be maintained along with that of surrounding parishes.

Situated on the Cheshire Plain, the landscape character is typical flat, rolling farmland and woodland, with traditional style buildings. Historic salt brine pumping has led to the creation of the “Flashes”, now a site of special interest for birdwatchers..

Brine extraction without replacement and the existence of a number of underlying brine runs, means that significant areas of the parish are potentially subject to ongoing ground movements.

Sandbach Town is mentioned twice in the 1086 Domesday Book. The town’s most famous landmark is the 9th Century “Sandbach Crosses”. The licence to hold a market every Thursday in the town was granted by Queen Elizabeth I in 1579. During the Civil War, a party of nearly 1,000 exhausted Scottish troops rode through Sandbach as they retreated from the Battle of Worcester. A skirmish occurred as the local people attacked the Scottish troops. The central common in Sandbach has since been known as Scotch Common.

During the late 16th and early 17th centuries, Sandbach was noted for the production of fine worsted yarns and malt liquor, which together with the fairs and market, made the Town “modestly affluent”. In the 1820’s and 30’s, Sandbach was an important coaching stop. Later in the 19th Century, the Town produced silk, boots and shoes and enjoyed extensive trade with its corn mills and salt works along the Trent and Mersey Canal. Sandbach is within the Silk, Cotton and Market Towns area in the Cheshire East Council Design Guide

The 20th Century saw the upsurge of heavy vehicle manufacturing industry within the Town and heavy goods vehicles were produced by both E.R.F. and Foden.

The Sandbach Conservation Area consists of one major historical delineation which takes in Hightown to the bottom of High Street at the Bridge plus later additions.

Wheelock Village, was recorded in the Domesday Book under its original name of Hoileck/Hoiloch. The name Wheelock was finally settled upon in 1390. In 1801 the population was 189, and by 1901 it was 685. Wheelock had its own Mayor up until 1849. An historian in 1850 described Wheelock as “a township and pleasant village in a neighbourhood richly diversified with picturesque beauty, intersected by the North Staffordshire Railway and the Trent and Mersey Canal. There were once three salt works, two sawmills, two breweries, a soap factory, and three silk factories. Virtually all of these industries have now disappeared and the North Staffordshire railway branch from Kidsgrove to Sandbach (Elworth) ceased passenger service in the 1930’s and closed for freight traffic in the 1960’s. This disused track has since become the “Wheelock Rail Trail” and is used extensively by walkers and cyclists.

Elworth Village is described as “a village approximately one mile to the west of Sandbach”. It has several pubs and a few shops. St Peter's Church has a large modern community hall. It also has the railway station serving Sandbach, which is on the main line between Crewe and Manchester. A branch line to Middlewich is under consideration for reopening for passenger traffic services through to Northwich. The railway encouraged the establishment of the local industrial base and Elworth was the home of Foden the lorry makers until 1980. The Trent and Mersey canal runs to the southwest of the village.

Ettiley Heath grew out of the narrowboat trade on the Trent and Mersey Canal. It was home to many of the salt workers from Sifta Salt, which operated where Springvale Industrial Estate is situated today. The salt factories grew out of the brine pumping locally.

Sandbach Heath is separated from the main settlement of Sandbach by the *Dingle Brook* that runs across Sandbach. The land rises up the valley sides until you reach a flat area of land which represents the main area of the Heath. Sandbach Heath was once a woodland area but now, St John the Evangelist Church (1861, designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott), can be seen from many miles. The settlement borders open agricultural countryside north and west and a private golf course to the east. The Trent & Mersey canal forms part of the western boundary.

Over the years, derelict or contaminated land has been brought back in to use for development in preference to greenfield sites. Examples include land at Ettiley Heath and the former bone works at Rookery Bridge.

As you would expect in a rural town, air quality in the parish is generally good. Monitoring of smoke and sulphur dioxide was undertaken in the Town from 1979 until the early 2000, during which time, levels decreased and no breaches of the EEC directive were recorded. In the late 1990s spot samples were taken for Carbon Monoxide with results significantly below health guidelines. Airborne lead levels reduced as unleaded petrol became the norm.

As a rural community private car ownership and usage is the predominant method of transport; with approximately 43% of all homes owning at least 2 or more cars. Sandbach is located directly adjacent to the M6 J17 which provides good connectivity; however it is also a major threat due to the amount of through traffic this generates on key routes through the town. Congestion and standing traffic are common and likely to increase with the proposed Middlewich Bypass. There is currently an Air Quality Management Area at the Junction of A534 and A5022 due to nitrogen dioxide levels. A further AQMA on Middlewich Road was only revoked in 2021, but concerns remain.

The Neighbourhood Plan states “ areas of high biodiversity and geodiversity value will be protected and enhanced”. Enhancement measures will include increasing the total area of valuable habitat and linking up existing areas of high value habitat to create 'ecological steppingstone sites', 'wildlife corridors' and 'Nature Improvements Areas'. Ecological networks and connectivity are vitally important in sustaining sites and addressing the impacts of climate change”.

The town centre provides a range of planting, seating, and gateway features, but the majority of the public realm across the town needs upgrades and maintenance as pavements present some uneven surfaces. The 'cobble' town square provides high quality public space and adds to the historic character as well as slowing down vehicles. Block paving is quite consistent in other parts of the centre, but more recent materials have been added which support vehicles and detract from clear, good quality paved pedestrian area. Street cleansing and

grounds maintenance struggle to meet published standards since austerity cuts and the Town Council provides a Ranger service to supplement these services. Continuing from the days of Congleton Borough Council, the town's roundabouts have excellent floral displays with potential for future wildflower planting of highway grass verges.

AN ENGAGED COMMUNITY

The population of Sandbach has risen from 17,976 in 2011, to approximately 21,000 (48.8% male and 51.2% female) currently. The age structure of the population is like that for Cheshire East. Both Sandbach and Cheshire East have lower younger and larger older populations than regionally or nationally

In Sandbach, the proportion of over 65's increased by 42% from 2001-2019 and are projected to increase by a further 17% from 2019 to 2030 as the town grows. The proportion of under 19's decreased by 9% from 2001-2019 and are projected to decrease by a further 4% from 2019 to 2030. (Sandbach Housing Needs Report, 2021).

Working age adults are 62% of population (64.7% in England) and lone parent families are below the national average. Black and ethnic minority people make up only 3.4% of the population (20.2% in England). People born outside UK represent 3.4% (13.8% in England).

Total weekly household income is above both Cheshire East and National average. The net weekly household income estimate after housing cost is again above both Cheshire East and National average. This does not mean however that there are no pockets of deprivation. For example, many within our elderly population will be constrained by a fixed retirement income.

Sandbach has historically had a strong sense of community. Its first Town Hall was built in 1810, the Literary Institute in 1857, and 20 almshouses in the 1860s when the population was around 3500. The Wesleyan Society opened a Sunday school in 1871, behind what is now the Wesleyan Chapel. The Snapes "Britannia" Theatre (portable theatre) started a second season of plays on Scotch Common Sandbach in 1889. In 1891, the Marriott family donated land to the Town, which is now the Park and their house which became a library to be replaced by the current library in the 1960s.

There have been many celebrations in the town, including the 60th Anniversary of Queen Victoria's Coronation in 1897, the "Relief of Mafeking" in 1900, the event that eventually led to the formation of the FODEN'S BAND. In 1913, King George V and Queen Mary visited Sandbach and Wheelock held a "Peace Celebration" in 1919, celebrating the end of the Great War. The Queen's Platinum Jubilee later this year will continue this tradition.

Sandbach people have always been able to pull together in adversity, a committee for the purpose of sending Christmas presents to all the men from Sandbach who were serving at the front in 1915 and a money raising fund to help purchase a Spitfire for the RAF in 1943. This same "spirit" has again been witnessed during the recent Pandemic.

Today, Sandbach still has a strong community "feel" with many regular events organised by and for local people. The lively market town traditions continue and the cobbled square, surrounded by black-and-white and thatched buildings along with the adjacent High Street and the nearby "Common" are venues for regular events such as markets, farmers markets, festivals, open-air concerts and fairs.

Some of the community groups hold events each year, such as a Beer Festival and Firework Displays. The town was the home of Foden's, and ERF Trucks and celebrates this with an annual Festival of Transport. In addition, the award winning and internationally acclaimed Fodens Brass Band is still based in Sandbach and is the core of

the “Party in the Park” event. Other events organized by the Town Council include the Christmas Market and Lights, Family Funday and the Market Town Festival.

Clubs and societies in Sandbach have a high level of community involvement supporting a wide variety of activities, from sporting activities to cultural and community-based pastimes.

There is a community Cinema at the Town Hall. Many of the organising groups present and promote their activities through “Sandbach Today” organised by the Sandbach Partnership. Sandbach Partnership is a voluntary and community led organisation working with many local groups and statutory bodies. Their aim is to enhance the quality of life for the benefit of the people of Sandbach and the surrounding area.

Sandbach History Society meets monthly from September to April. Sandbach Amateur Dramatics & Operatic Society put on regular productions. There is also a Choral Society, Sandbach Garden Trail, Sandbach Woodland and Wildlife Group, Sandbach Footpath Group, a very active U3A and many more. The Town Council have a Community Grants Scheme to help such groups with set-up, expansion and projects.

The Council for Voluntary Services has a diminished role in the Town, as does the Citizens Advice Bureau. Efforts are now being made to establish a Community Hub, to galvanise, support and advise people and voluntary organisations. Lifeline Debt advice is available at the Wesley Centre.

Youth organisations in Sandbach include Scouts, Guides, Brownies, Air Cadets and other military cadet forces as well as Fire Cadets.

The town has two single sex secondary schools and six primary schools.

AN AGENDA FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING

During the Pandemic, life expectancy in the UK reduced, reversing a tradition going back decades. As we have seen, Sandbach is generally a relatively affluent area and it is not surprising that life expectancy for both males and females is higher than the regional and national averages. Consistently, smoking rates are lower and healthy eating rates higher than those for the region or UK. In a survey of the Cheshire East Council’s Citizens Panel, 74% of respondents described their general health as ‘good or very good’ and 5% described it as ‘bad or very bad’.

Sandbach is a reasonably safe place to live. The crime rate (per 1,000 population) for Cheshire East (including Sandbach) is 29 against the North West average of 36.9 and country average of 37.6.

The Parish has had a considerable increase in the number of houses over the last decade from 8119 in 2011 to 10,818 in 2020. 19% of these additional houses were affordable, but this was below the 30% target. An additional 1089 dwellings have planning approval to be built.

The main medical facility is the Ashfield Primary Care and Pharmacy Centre. There are also 3 additional pharmacies and 6 dental practices. A number of charitable organisations also support health and wellbeing, including the Migraine and Me group and Dementia Friendly Sandbach.

Sandbach Leisure Centre (joint public/school use) provides an indoor sports hall, drama room and swimming pool and outdoor cricket, rugby, five-a-side astro turf pitches and tennis courts. Football pitches are available on Hind Heath Road, Ettiley Heath. It is interesting to note that the first public baths opened in 1853 on Newcastle Road.

Sandbach Park, Elworth Park, Wheelock Playing Fields, Mortimer Drive Play Area and Church Lane Community Park on Sandbach Heath are the main open air recreational areas with, several smaller areas of open space containing play equipment. Notable footpaths/ walkways include Wheelock Rail Trail and Sandbach Wildlife

Corridor along with several woodland trails linking to a footpaths network. Allotments are presently situated at a temporary location in Ettiley Heath, facilitated by the Council. There is an ongoing project to find a permanent site.

Sandbach Cricket Club was founded in 1886 and is currently situated in Hind Heath Road. Other sporting clubs include Sandbach Rugby Club, Elworth Cricket Club, Sandbach Golf Club and Sandbach United Football Club. Privately owned Gyms are available in Elworth, Wheelock and the Sandbach town centre.

Sandbach has a very well supported U3A who promote and encourage mental and physical education and activities for the many maturing residents of the area.

There is a very strong tradition of music in the area with Fodens and Lions Youth Brass, the Coop Wind Band together with the Love Music Trust, all encouraging musical engagement within schools and the wider population. Sandbach Concert Series promote 8 classical music concerts each year with professional musicians, preceded by a 30-minute section spotlighting young (school age) musicians.

A COUNCIL TO DELIVER

Sandbach has been a seat of local government as we now know it, since the Sandbach Urban District was created in 1894. This was preceded by the Sandbach Urban Sanitary District 1875- 1894. In 1974, the Urban District Council, along with the urban districts of Alsager and Middlewich, the original Congleton Borough and Congleton Rural District, was incorporated into a new Congleton Borough, which also had its headquarters in Sandbach. Congleton Borough was itself abolished in 2009 when Cheshire East Council was formed, taking over the Sandbach offices.

Sandbach Town Council was inaugurated in 1974, to provide the local council tier of local government for the town of Sandbach. Serving approximately 21,000 residents, it exists to serve as a vehicle of local opinion; to provide an effective link between the local residents and council taxpayers with the Unitary Council, to express local feelings and interests and to keep watch on all developments within the Town. Cheshire East Council are currently consulting on a Local Governance Review which may result in changes to some ward boundaries and additional town councillors.

The Town Council is a consultee to examine plans due for consideration by Cheshire East Council as planning authority. It also manages a range of local services and facilities that includes: the Town Hall, the Towns historic Indoor and Outdoor Markets, the Ranger Service, public toilets, and Small Common Carpark. The Council also runs several well-regarded Town outdoor community events across the Town.

The Town Council has been a well-respected institution in the Town with several notable achievements. It had built a number of rewarding links into the community and will strengthen these by fostering more formal links with schools and enabling a “youth voice” into the Council.

During the last 3 years or so, the Town Council has been hampered by a plethora of issues which have prevented it functioning at its best. The Pandemic has been just one of these challenges, others include a plague of malicious communications and vexatious information requests. Despite these challenges, the Council has continued to support the community including through the People Helping People scheme and the work of the town Ranger as well as keeping services running such as the Indoor Market Hall and the outdoor markets.

The Council has been looking carefully at these issues, not to lay blame but to enable it to learn and prevent a recurrence. There is now clear ambition, drive, and capacity across the Council. There is a determination for all councillors to work together, with staff, with other public and voluntary bodies and with the community for the benefit of Sandbach.