



Sandbach Town Council Response to Cheshire East Council (CEC) Green Spaces Maintenance Standards Policy

Introduction

The Town Council has engaged with its residents regarding this consultation through direct work of various ward councillors, particularly in Elworth, which is indisputably hardest hit by the current proposals.

Overall, however, the Town Council is approaching this matter as a Sandbach wide issue, with our aspiration that the whole town looks beautiful, reflecting and encouraging the amazing civic pride which is present in this community. We should all be working together to celebrate and sustain this community well being.

The CEC consultation was debated by the Town Council's Planning, Consultation and Environment Committee on Monday 20th November which, under the Council's scheme of delegation, has the authority to respond to consultations on behalf of the Town Council. Significantly, this is one of the most well attended public meetings held in recent times at the Town Hall, with over 50 members of the public present in the public gallery invited to contribute to the meeting. Two residents asked specific questions, one of which submitted a comprehensive written response, which is attached as an appendix to this document.

No residents or members at this meeting spoke in support of the proposals and there was particularly strong feeling that the proposals were unacceptable on a number of fronts. (meeting audio: <https://archive.org/details/p-e-c-20.11.23>).

Both general and specific responses and suggestions are outlined below, including a section relating to each ward, for which the Town Council and its residents require an evidence based response.

Sandbach Town Council General Response Points:

The Council's general response points to the CEC Green Spaces Maintenance Standards Policy, based on substantial resident and members feedback, are as follows:

- The general approach to the CEC Green Space Maintenance Standards Policy appears to be inequitable and results in a divisive approach which potentially pitches wards and localities against each other – a 'winners and losers' effect;

- Much of the data included in the draft policy is inaccurate and inconsistent with categorisations which do not make sense and / or lead to unfair outcomes. The Council requires reassurance that information / data is being produced – and now reviewed - with involvement with its local partners, residents, the Town Council and ANSA who maintain much of the green spaces and have operational expertise to rely on. Such an approach is encouraged going forward to better manage the quality of the consultation information, and consequently the reaction to it, going forward;
- The impression is that of a rushed and ill informed strategy, with unrealistic deadlines to adequately address the issues arising, and conflation of consultation on policy and implementation, all of which is causing chaos and understandable anger in the community. Such significant proposals affecting all residents require time, reliable data, properly organised consultation and credible drivers – not simply a requirement to make severe budget cuts;
- There is a feeling that attributing the policy to supporting a rewilding strategy is disingenuous at best and dishonest at worst – whilst the Town Council fully supports rewilding in principle, it would expect to work with the Borough Council to develop an informed and positive approach across the wards to create mutually agreed rewilding opportunities;
- There are significant issues regarding the inconsistent approach to land owned by the Duchy of Lancaster against other ownership which need further thought and justification (as outlined below) before they can be accepted.

Sandbach Town Council Specific Response Points (By Ward):

Elworth (Cllr N Cook on behalf of this ward councillors)

36 Plots whose maintenance is proposed to cease as the Council have indicated that they do not own the land on the Grange Way Estate

This is a highly divisive and inequitable proposal.

Estates approved by Council planners in the 1970s were based on an open plan design with the green spaces being transferred as part of the planning agreement, to the local Council. In this instance Cheshire East Council are suggesting that they have failed to ensure the transfer was completed in all but 7 plots (this includes 4 plots which have been subsequently re-classified as Highway Land by Cheshire East Council prior to consultation but after the Community and Environment Committee on the 28th September 2023). As a result of this proposal, 36 plots of land on just one housing estate, known as the Grange Way Estate, will have their maintenance stopped.

The four plots which were classified as Highways land on the Grange Way Estate (phase 5-6 of development) were identified on legal documentation provided by

Cheshire East Council subsequent to the Committee decision on the 28th September. STC strongly encourage this same principle to be applied on verges and visibility splays which are part of the Highway using the same principles as applied in phases 5 and 6 to phases 1 -4.

Once the highway plots are considered, the remaining plots are larger green spaces which are recognised as amenity spaces. These areas have been maintained for over 50 years on assumed adoption. These larger green spaces are at the very heart of the estate, and give the estate it's character, and are well used by residents of the estate and surrounding areas. Due to the amenity value it is STC's view that maintenance should continue. We have to remember that these plots of land have been maintained by a public authority for over 50 years.

The consultation proposes that 36 plots of land are abandoned, resulting in an estate which has a primary school, play areas, a supermarket and interconnected pavements to these amenities, to be uncared for, and unsafe for those who live there. This is not about delivering a re-wilding policy as suggested, as there is no outline as to how re-wilding will occur, apart from not cutting the grass and shrubs. It can not simply be left to nature.

Within the consultation it also outlines that a number of plots of land will be continued to be maintained on the Tatton Drive Estate. The identified plots of land on the Tatton Drive Estate are owned by the Duchy of Lancaster (HM Majesty King Charles 111). **It is a highly inequitable position to take that the lands owned by the King are maintained, however lands owned by other individuals in other parts of Sandbach are not maintained.** Whilst it is accepted that the Duchy of Lancaster has no obligation to maintain, neither does Cheshire East Council. Cheshire East Council have also indicated that enforcement action will not be taken on any landowner who does not maintain their land. This lack of enforcement of owners of land on the Grange Way Estate, will therefore afford them the same status as Crown owned land – where there is no obligation to maintain.

STC strongly encourage CEC to continue to maintain all of those lands on the Grange Way estate as a consequence of the clearly documented position that these plots were adopted or where the intention was to adopt, however the Council failed to act. Residents should not be penalised by this lack of action.

War Memorials

The consultation proposes that maintenance should continue with respect to Sandbach Town War Memorial, but maintenance will not take place with regards to Elworth War Memorial. This position is inequitable and should be addressed.

Parks

Currently Elworth Park has been listed for low maintenance, Lightly Close Playground has been listed for medium maintenance, Rookery Close Play Area has been listed for medium maintenance, Sandbach Heath Playground has been listed for medium maintenance, and Sandbach Park has been listed for High maintenance.

Elworth Park is a much loved space with a well used green space at it's very centre. It is particularly well used by children playing football. To list this Park for low maintenance is discriminatory, particularly when other Parks have been listed for medium maintenance.

Classification of Rural Open Spaces – Sites Owned by Cheshire East Council

14 plots of land have been identified in Elworth as being owned by Cheshire East Council. 12 of these spaces have been classified as rural open spaces – low maintenance. The classification is incorrect. The lands identified are next to highways as part of housing estates. They are not open green spaces in the middle of the countryside, as exemplified within the consultation policy.

It is therefore the view of the STC that these 12 plots owned by Cheshire East which are currently classified as rural open spaces – low maintenance, **should be re-classified as urban open spaces – medium maintenance.**

Classification of Green spaces which are not registered in CEC ownership

Abbey Road No 9 G - inspection only

Elworth Road no 91 rural open space - low

London Road north of Elm Tree Lane - inspection only

Middlewich Road 203 – 231 rural open space - low

Richmond Close rural open space - low

Ruscoe avenue near Deans Lane rural open space - low

This classification will mean that two areas will not be maintained at all, and the remaining 4 areas will only receive 1 visit annually. All of these spaces have been classified as Highway land and are located in densely populated residential areas. **These areas should be re-classified as urban rural areas medium using the guidance within the strategy.**

Grange Way Estate Footpath urban open space - low

This plot should be re-classified as medium as it is the main footpath connecting the estate to the Primary school and the supermarket. A cut one or two times a year would have a significant impact on the ability for users to use the footpath safely.

Mulberry Gardens opposite 20-26 urban open space - low

This plot should be re-classified as medium as it is a densely populated residential area.

Town Ward (Cllr J Arnold on behalf of ward councillors)

As councillors for Sandbach Town Ward we would like to object to Cheshire East's proposal to stop maintaining certain green spaces in Sandbach. We find the information supplied by Cheshire East regarding the plots in question to be confusing and, in some cases, wrong. We are also concerned that this cost cutting measure

pits one ward against another and one housing estate against another. While the plots that CEC propose to stop maintaining are not in Town Ward there are plots here which might be next on the list. Town Ward councillors would like to see all of Sandbach remain beautiful and well kept. We also recognize that Town Ward enjoys a little extra attention due to the town centre being part of it. This results in, for example, the town centre war memorial receiving maintenance while the Elworth war memorial does not. We expect Cheshire East to show equal respect to the Elworth memorial and give it the same maintenance.

Ettiley Heath & Wheelock (Cllr S Richards on behalf of this ward councillors)

Regarding Ettiley Heath and Wheelock, there are certain elements of inequity that stand out. Firstly, the difference in proposed maintenance between Wheelock Playing Fields, and Forge Fields Playing Field. One of these holds a full size football field and goalposts which is used for matches. The other is a multipurpose area which, while it does contain spaces for sports, is mostly used for children's games. Forge Fields, which is the football pitch, is designated as medium maintenance, yet Wheelock is high maintenance, despite the usage indicating that if Wheelock is high maintenance, it follows that Forge Fields should be also.

It is a concern that Cheshire East Council would include in a consultation such a large difference in maintenance for areas that, according to their own methodology, are for the same purpose. It seems clear that if one area classified for Outdoor Sport should be high maintenance, then others should be too. Particularly if that sport is something such as football which requires a well-maintained field.

I am also concerned that playgrounds which could be seen as relatively similar in both their use and style, for example Thornbrook Way and Lightley Close, again two areas categorised as the same, would receive differing maintenance. Both areas have large grassy areas, so the question is what has led to the decision being made to reduce maintenance in one but not another?

In addition, where possible, in order to help with both Councils' (Sandbach Town, and Cheshire East) environmental goals, Cheshire East Council should look into the possibility of "active" rewilding in areas where this is feasible. An example of this may be the Hind Heath Rd/Crewe Rd corner, where there are already large hedges present, and the grass is elevated enough that it would not present issues to the highway. By "active" rewilding, this does not mean simply leaving an area alone to grow as it wishes, but attempting to increase biodiversity and providing a guiding hand in the area, at least initially. This may not be feasible in the current financial situation faced by the Council, but it should be explored.

Sandbach Heath and East (Cllr T Wheatcroft on behalf of this ward councillors)

The basis of pretending abandoning maintenance of public spaces whoever owns them but have been looked after for decades is somehow on environmental grounds is being seen by some members and residents as quite opportunistic and immoral. If these areas offer possibilities for improving biodiversity arrangements should already be made locally and plans put in place to achieve and maintain this.

Civic pride of publicly visible areas is important to mental well being and publics' general attitudes to their environment. Civic pride will be undermined by these changes and a slide in expectation and behaviour of residents will be detrimental to all across the borough.

Palmer Close in SHEW is a high risk site for fly tipping if community allows site to go to wasteland. Rough shrubland is perfect for fly tipping and relying on neighbours to stop a slide in the community environment is difficult here due to the profile of many residents adjoining the area. There has been fly tipping on nearby passageways.

Heath Road junction is a site of importance and a community pride in this place exists at the entrance to a well travelled Heath Road at Sandbach Heath with its flower bed. Its categorization as not to be maintained and of no recreational use highlights the **rather confused selection** criteria across the borough. The selection ignores community pride and hence the potential mental health impact and community well being which should be supported by CEC.

The area on Crewe Road should be retained in CE maintenance and ideally extended to in front of the school to be brought up to a standard as the final runway area to the heart of the town. Again, a source of town pride. While residents perform further maintenance it is important that a minimum standard is maintained by CE as is the current situation.

Has highways considered that lots of longer grass as cut frequencies decrease will need upgraded equipment to cope with it and a disposal plan and cost for green waste collected? If cuttings are not removed, it will all mulch and grass will die underneath losing quality from grassland to rough grassland. Once rough grassland or with significant cuttings dog walkers who have an amenity use value in these areas (not recognised in the study by CE) will be unable to effectively 'scoop the poop' undermining the amenity value of any other users and posing a hygiene risk.

Regular cutting mitigates the need for grass removal, allows more uses of land and invokes a community pride. It could therefore be seen as a false economy and ultimately increase, rather than decrease costs to the tax payer.

The ability of CE to abandon historic commitments to residents (and reduce existing maintenance commitments already reduced in prior operational reviews) who pay council taxes in part for such basic services is a derogation of our communities and borough reflecting badly on the council's ability to manage its resources effectively.

Sandbach Town Council PCE Committee (on behalf of Sandbach Town Council)

CL / MM

24.11.23

**GREEN SPACES
MAINTENANCE**
Consultation 2023

A Residents View

*...has caused a sense
of unfairness!*

Councillor Craig Browne, Cheshire East Council Deputy Leader, has recently made the following comment when referring to the proposed parking charge review:

**The inherited legacy where some residents pay to park and others do not
“has caused a sense of unfairness”**

That comment alone describes how a group of residents in Elworth feel and speaks volumes when looking at the total unfairness of the proposed Green Space Maintenance Review proposed by CE.

The Grange Way / Lawton Way estate in the Sandbach - Elworth Ward, has been under attack from officers within the Council now for a number of years. It has become apparent that over the last 50+years , Councils have failed in their duty to ensure that the terms and conditions on which planning approvals were granted, have not been adhered to and records recently found clearly show that the failings have continued.

The issue involves the ownership of green amenity spaces scattered around our housing estates and until recent changes in planning policy, the Council would take ownership of the land as part of the agreed planning approval and maintain them.

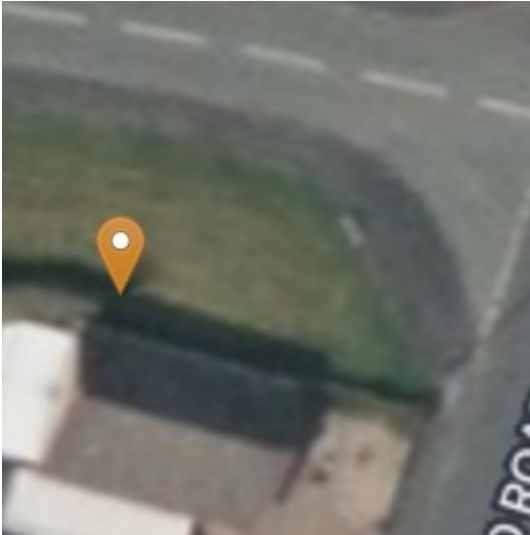
Despite this & rather than issue an apology to the community for their past errors and rectify their embarrassment, the Council are now planning to abandon a select number of plots around the Borough including Sandbach, however with a higher proportion being selected within the Sandbach Elworth Ward, compared to the rest of the Borough and indeed Sandbach.

On the following pages there are a few comparisons with another housing estate in Congleton and will leave you to form your own opinion about what appears to be some frightening discriminatory choices, all at the expense of the community of Elworth.

Both these plots of green space appear to be identical, both are not owned by CE and both are positioned at 'T' junctions on housing estates, however they have been designated with different Typologies, Asset Type & Amenity Levels.

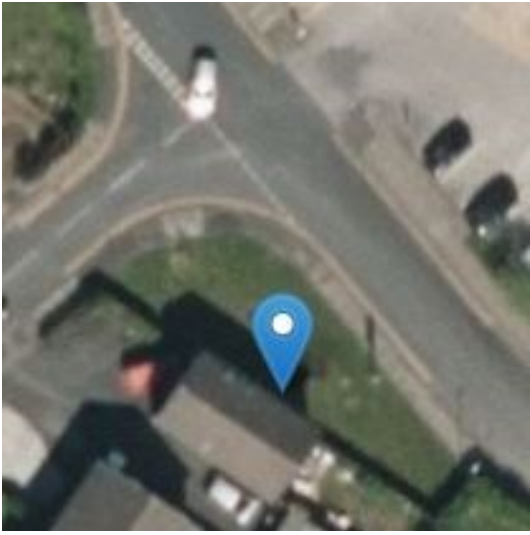
Cumberland Road | Congleton CW12 4PH

Typology: **E** | Asset Type: **2 - Highway** | Amenity Level: **Low**



St Peters Rise | Sandbach CW11 3EP

Typology: **H** | Asset Type: **3 - Housing Estate** | Amenity Level: **N/A**



It is difficult to work out the methodology used when deciding that these 2 plots of amenity space have been categorised as being different, more so when you realise that the Sandbach junction is opposite the largest supermarket in the Elworth Ward and is also an access road used when dropping children off at Elworth Hall Primary School, therefore a far busier junction than the other one.

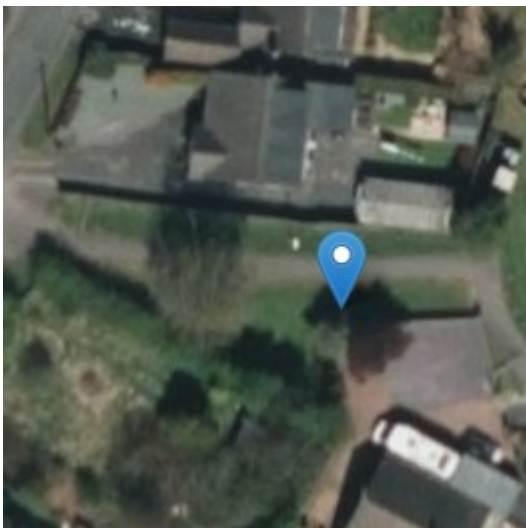
Walk Way Kendal Court | Congleton CW12 4JN

Typology: **E** | Asset Type: **2 - Highway** | Amenity Level: **Low**



Walk Way Dean Close | Sandbach CW11 1YG

Typology: **H** | Asset Type: **3 - Housing Estate** | Amenity Level: **N/A**

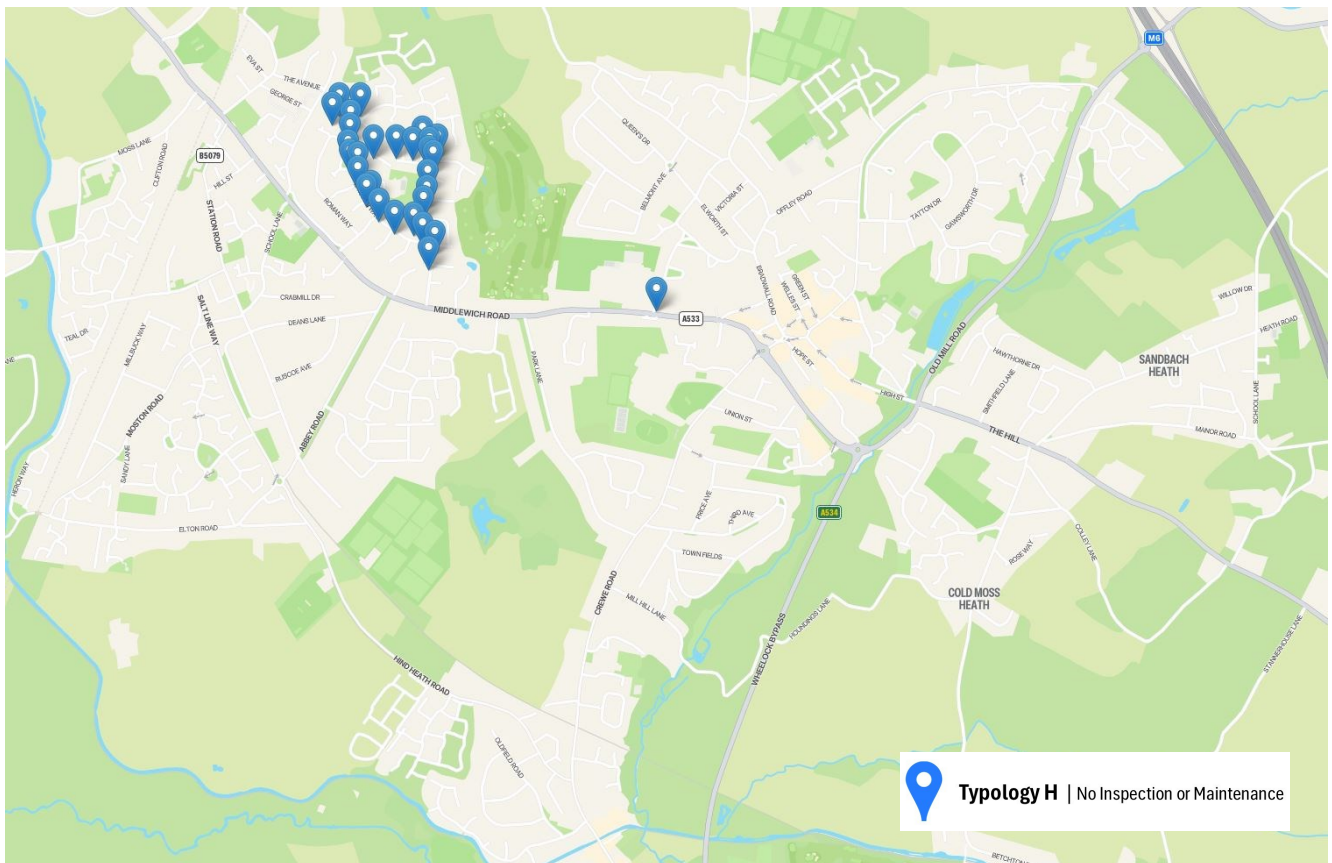


Two walkways through housing estates with the Congleton location being allocated ongoing maintenance and the Sandbach one being abandoned.

The Congleton walkway takes you behind the houses, however the Sandbach one is used by people from the estate walking to the railway station, visiting Elworth Park or walking to work at the industrial estate off Station Road, in addition to which people walk onto the estate to drop children at the school, including school children walking on their own and people visiting the supermarket.

The comparisons used here are just a small sample of the number of discriminatory, prejudiced and unfair decisions being put forward by the Head of Environmental Services at Cheshire East Council, under his guise as Lead for Council policy to be Carbon Neutral by 2025.

The map below indicates the areas of Sandbach that have been designated Typology H, which includes “sites where there is no proposed planned inspection or maintenance as the site is allowed to be re-wilded to enhance biodiversity” and therefore suggests that Elworth is to become the Biodiversity Capital of Sandbach, ensuring CE reach their 2025 target!



Although as CE do not own any of the plots of amenity spaces indicated, I would challenge their introduction of these plots into the biodiversity debate or indeed this consultation.

In addition to the inequality of this report there are also many errors that should make this consultation null & void, thus:

- ◆ In the data the Site Ref column does not match the Easting/Northing readings on occasions.
- ◆ Plots that are owned by the Council are missing from the Consultation Data.

- ◆ Plots not owned by the Council are missing from the Consultation Data.
- ◆ Inaccuracy of grid references makes it impossible to identify certain plots. *The 12 digit grid reference numbers are usually accurate to a 1 square metre area, however on one occasion the data is suggesting that a dwellings front garden is Typology D | Urban Open Space.*

The number of errors in the information presented to the community is unsatisfactory, unworthy and negligent and ask that the Sandbach Town Council Members back the residents of Sandbach Elworth in their efforts to have this consultation thrown out and request that all plots highlighted for abandonment continue to be maintained by the council, which has been the custom and practice for the last 50 years.

Peter Jennings

Resident of Elworth Sandbach | 14 November 2023