

# NEW HEIGHTS

How Cheshire East is using its assets to become a catalyst for economic growth





It's one of the most successful sub-regional economies in the UK and has an award-winning local authority that's close to becoming self-sufficient. Cheshire East has long been a highly desirable place to live. And with excellent connectivity – soon to be boosted by the arrival of HS2 at Crewe – business locations that attract cutting edge international firms and educational standards among the best in the country, Cheshire East's future looks bright.

Kath O'Dwyer, acting chief executive of Cheshire East Council, reckons the local authority 'has all the ingredients to absolutely fly'.

Given it presides over an economic hotspot and in the last 12 months has secured substantial Government infrastructure investment and had its best ever year for awards – winning 13 and being shortlisted for more than 20 – many would argue it's already up there.

But perhaps what makes recent success all the more sweet is the fact that those achievements have come during the most challenging period experienced by the council since it was created in 2009.

The authority suspended three senior officers last April as part of an investigation into their conduct. It came a little more than a year after the leader of the council resigned amid calls for a probe into his behaviour.

Despite these internal issues, it's been business as usual from a council delivery perspective.

'Our ability to deliver services hasn't been impacted by "the noise" surrounding us,' Kath explains. 'It's testament to staff that they have continued to deliver increasingly high quality services despite all of that going on – and to the current political leadership and senior team that they've managed "the noise" in a way that's not distracted the organisation from focusing on what's important to our residents.'

If anything, those challenges have led to a renewed focus and a drive to create a more open and collaborative local authority. An internal probe by the council, backed by investment in extra auditing capacity, has led to a number of cases being referred to the police. As Kath puts it: 'If things don't smell right, we deal with it.'

She adds: 'I would not lead any organisation that didn't do the right thing at the right time. We are

### Cheshire East: In numbers



376,700 Residents



97,248 Qualified to level 4 and above



20,200 Businesses



£12.2bn Economy



27% Higher GVA per head than UK average

## STARRING ROLE IN A VITAL PARTNERSHIP

Cheshire East has been dubbed the 'glue that binds the Northern Powerhouse and the Midlands Engine' thanks to its strategically important location and buoyant economy. That role is being amplified through The Constellation Partnership. It brings together seven local authorities across Cheshire and North Staffordshire, plus two local enterprise partnerships, with the common aim of 'creating the place where everything connects'.

It's essentially about harnessing the potential brought by investment in HS2 and using it as a catalyst for growth throughout the surrounding area. The aim is to deliver more than 100,000 homes and 120,000 jobs by 2040.

As the Constellation Partnership website explains: 'Partners share a single vision – a single economic footprint creating a coherent investment market boosted by the international investment magnet of high speed rail connectivity. This is an unbeatable growth opportunity for investors.'



From the 'high-tech clusters of the historic Cheshire plain towns, the city of Stoke-on-Trent's international centre of ceramics, the rolling hills and vibrant enterprise culture of Staffordshire, to the nationally strategic HS2-hub town of Crewe... it's a constellation of interconnected economic stars'.

: [constellationpartnership.co.uk](http://constellationpartnership.co.uk)

# Recipe for success

Cheshire East has all the ingredients for a bright future – led by a local authority with a renewed sense of purpose

all aligned in that view. We know it's painful and difficult and people will question our abilities and question us as a council. But this is short-term pain for long-term gain and we will put our house in order.'

That approach is echoed in the decision to ask the Local Government Association (LGA) to carry out an independent review of the council's organisational culture. Published in January, it revealed bullying and harassment had taken place among a minority of employees but also said it 'now has the right political and managerial leadership to continue to steer the organisation in the direction it wishes to go'.

The council has since appointed a strategic partner to help address those issues as part of a wider 'fresh start' for the whole council that includes the launch of a new constitution and supplementary guidance on member-officer protocol.

It's partly about ensuring the roles of elected members and officers are clearly defined while 'laying the foundations for the future', says Kath. 'The jobs we're asking people to do are really hard and we're in a climate of high expectation and increasing demand for our services. We have got to create an environment for staff where they are safe, secure, supported and valued. A place where we can connect the delivery with the vision.'

'It's also about embedding a learning culture. For example, we have engaged in a number of sector led peer review of services and there are plans to commission a full corporate peer review later this year.'

But ultimately the goal is to ensure the council is equipped to make the most of the opportunities ahead. Cheshire East is on course to be self-funding by 2020 through council tax, business rates, New Homes Bonus and other income streams created by its highly successful economy and an increasing focus on commercialisation.

The north of the borough has been successful for a number of years across a number of sectors – for example, it sits within one of the UK's strongest science and technology clusters and is home to world-leading R&D at Alderley Park. Meanwhile, the arrival of HS2 at

Crewe in 2027 will be a major catalyst for regeneration in the south of the borough and indeed the borough as a whole and wider sub-region. (see pages 4-5)

Cheshire East 'has a bit of everything', says Kath. It's a 'place of places' with urban conurbations, historic market towns, beautiful countryside and green spaces and 'an economy to die for'.

It also happens to sit in a strategically important position between the Northern Powerhouse and Midlands Engine and is seen by Government as a key player in delivering its economic growth agenda. That growth will bring with it added demand for housing and local services. Cheshire East Council is increasingly working across a number of partnerships to both manage that demand and bring forward new ways of working in an era of tighter budgets. It's captured by the council's new strapline: Working for a brighter future – together.

For example, like many areas the emphasis across adults and children's services is on early intervention and early help, centred around outcomes, in order to nurture a more resilient population. But it's about doing it in a way that builds on collective and individual strengths, working with the public, voluntary and community sectors to create greater capacity and more responsive provision. (see pages 6-7).

Pragmatism linked to a shared vision for the borough is the order of the day. Cheshire East's partnerships take a variety of forms and the same goes for the way services are delivered.

In the past it's been dubbed a 'commissioning council'. The latest corporate plan describes it as a 'best fit approach' so that, as Kath puts it: 'Whether we deliver ourselves, in partnership with others, through a delivery vehicle or a staff mutual it's about whatever gets us the best result.'

She adds: 'We've got stable political leadership, the strongest cabinet for a long time and an outstanding senior team. We're well placed to ensure Cheshire East is where it should be: a high performing authority that punches above its weight and has the confidence of its partners and Government.'



Kath O'Dwyer, acting chief executive of Cheshire East Council



Cllr Rachel Bailey

Leader of Cheshire East Council

**A**t Cheshire East we take decisions for the long-term, investing in the future and responding to changing circumstances.

A key aim of this council is a fully-connected HS2 Crewe hub, capable of handling up to seven HS2 trains per hour, each way, and a new northern junction, allowing Crewe and the region to benefit from direct HS2 services to and from London, Manchester and Birmingham.

It was great to see our vision supported by Government with the publication in March of the results of the consultation, 'Crewe Hub: options for building on existing connectivity'.

Our challenge, however, remains. We operate in an increasingly competitive UK and global marketplace. We must work hard to deliver continuous improvements in productivity in both the private and public sectors.

At the same time we are committed to maintaining the quality of Cheshire East's countryside, villages and market towns and regenerating our urban areas, reflecting their distinct assets and character.

We must also shape a place that provides homes for an increasing number of families and young people and enable strong communities to improve their health and wellbeing. We must work with health partners to reduce health inequalities and enable people to live longer, healthier lives in or near their own homes.

Our relationships with partners, businesses and communities are critical. We are working for a brighter future together - and this means taking people with us and sharing our vision.

We have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity now to maximise the potential of our borough, giving opportunity to all, and I, for one, do not want to miss it.

# Preparing for a fast track economy

With once-in-a-lifetime investment arriving in Cheshire East via HS2, the focus is on ensuring the benefits are felt for generations to come



Crewe's past was built on the railway industry and trains are going to have a major impact on its future – and that of neighbouring towns and cities.

The arrival of HS2 in 2027 will be a game-changer in terms of economic growth and transformation. By 2033 Crewe will be one of the busiest stations on the network and four of the UK's top five economic centres will be within an hour's journey.

Cheshire East Council has lobbied hard with its partners to ensure that Crewe gets the best deal possible. For example, it set out a compelling case for a fully integrated rail hub and for up to seven trains an hour rather than the two per hour originally proposed.

The results of Government consultation, published in March, revealed overwhelming support for enhanced connectivity and more frequent services to and from Crewe and recognition of the collaborative work of the council, Network Rail and Government in developing plans for an enhanced hub station. A final decision is due on the Crewe hub station later this year.

It's indicative of the wider proactive approach taken by the council. 'We are making sure we capitalise on our profile because we are already well located and ideally placed to support the Government's wider economic strategy,' explains Frank Jordan, executive director, place and acting deputy chief executive.

'Some places could take quite a passive approach around HS2. We are saying we need to make sure we capitalise on the opportunity of HS2 and get the right solution to deliver growth not just for Cheshire East but for surrounding areas.'

Securing Crewe's status as a fully integrated rail hub will ensure better local links into the town.

To the north of the borough, Macclesfield will also become part of the HS2 network following

an announcement by Government in March with the potential for HS2 services from 2027, six years earlier than phase 2b.

Regeneration plans are in place for both towns to ensure they are ready to take advantage of their enhanced connectivity.

In the case of Crewe, it's also about getting the right outcome for the station itself. The council has worked with the Government to develop plans that will see Crewe hub station integrated with 'a regenerated and transformational station campus area' that links in with a wider masterplan for the town. Work is due to start on the station in 2021.

'We want Crewe to be a successful place and the station is part of that,' says Frank. 'We need to ensure there's the right amount of commercial space, car parking etc and we have a leadership role to make sure all that happens.'

'It's about being more actively involved, leading projects on what the station will look like and its role from regeneration and commercial perspective.'

The council has secured £40m to invest in town centre improvements, including a cinema and better public realm, with the aim of making Crewe a successful place well ahead of HS2's arrival.

Both Crewe and Macclesfield will play a vital role in attracting more young people to live and work in Cheshire East to address its ageing demographic and ensure employers have the workforce they need.

The borough is creating plenty of jobs – the key challenge is around ensuring young people are equipped with the relevant skills and are able to get on

the housing ladder.

By being creative and tailoring solutions, Frank believes the council is making the most of its unique position.

'We're the gateway to the Northern Powerhouse but also to the Midlands Engine.'

'I don't think there's any other local authority that borders both whilst also having direct links to Wales and the West.'

'It puts us at the centre of the map and we're not just looking one way. These provide the ingredients for a very strong offer. We have things that many other areas haven't got – a strong economy, jobs and attractive places to live. Most have one or two but few have all three. There's no reason not to be in Cheshire East and you can get to London and Manchester and Birmingham quickly.'





**SHIFT**

Celebrating digital discoveries across Cheshire East



## SHIFT and Weave: championing the creative and digital industries

While Cheshire East has long had strengths in areas such as science and technology, automotive, advanced manufacturing and agritech, one of the fastest growing sectors is creative and digital industries. The borough is home to more than 2,000 firms that employ around 7,500 people and generate a turnover in excess of £500m a year.

Although most are small businesses, there are a number of leading firms including: Warner Bros-owned TT Fusion, makers of Lego games, in Wilmslow; ThinkPositive's newly-established European design centre in Bollington; Bentley in Crewe; AstraZeneca in Macclesfield; Barclays global technology centre in Knutsford; and McCann, in Prestbury, the largest advertising agency outside London.

It's viewed by the council as a key sector in terms of supporting growth and prosperity across the whole of its patch, particularly for rural areas.

Last year saw the launch of the SHIFT initiative, described as a 'vibrant and interactive programme celebrating all things digital in Cheshire East'. Through everything from exhibitions to workshops, the idea is to showcase the area's talent and inspire people of all ages.

The programme has been funded by Arts Council England and is run in partnership with the council's length firm, the Skills and Growth Company, and Liverpool John Moores University.

Ian Tabbron, senior relationship manager at Arts Council England, believes the programme is helping to 'demonstrate Cheshire East can become a leader in digital arts'.

For example, in February a 'virtual reality playground' toured libraries across Cheshire East that allowed people to 'draw with light' and try out VR headsets.

But there was also a more serious element - Dr Jess Symons, creative economy fellow at the University of Manchester, took part in the tour as part of her research into how VR can be used as a tool to connect rural areas with the creative digital sector.

Linking in with SHIFT is the Weave network, an industry-led group to promote Cheshire East's creative and digital industries that's coordinated by the Skills and Growth Company. Taking its name from the textile and silk industry that Cheshire East was built on, Weave ran a programme of six Town Talks that were designed to inform, spark debate and offer practical advice, including a talk by renowned designer Wayne Hemingway.

Weave also enables the sector to promote the borough as the ideal place for creative and digital firms to locate.

[www.shift-digital.co.uk/www.weave.org.uk](http://www.shift-digital.co.uk/www.weave.org.uk)





# Building on your assets

Cheshire East is embracing challenges around health and social care to forge a co-produced future with residents and partners

Like many local authorities, Cheshire East Council has embarked on a transformative journey in terms of how it supports the most vulnerable in society. It is now widely accepted that old models of social care are no longer affordable or sustainable and there has been a shift towards new ways of working that achieve better outcomes for the user.

Cheshire East has embraced early intervention and early help across its adults and children's provision, which together with the communities and public health teams make up a single, integrated people directorate.

This has required cultural change both within the council and across the many partners – and communities – it works with. While it is a predominantly affluent borough, Cheshire East has pockets of deprivation and challenges around an ageing population and rural isolation.

Acting chief executive Kath O'Dwyer has worked in a number of local authorities with high levels of deprivation. But she concedes it can be more of a challenge to tackle poverty in a prosperous area like Cheshire East. 'When you have widespread deprivation, the organisation is geared up to dealing with that. For us it's about doing things differently in different areas of the borough,' she says.

That includes being one of the first councils to make care leavers exempt from council tax until they are 25. It's also about investing in young people, a stance that has contributed towards Cheshire East having one of the lowest rates of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) in the country.

Mark Palethorpe, acting executive director, people, sums up the overall approach as one of focusing on the borough's assets – whether it's the individual strengths of an older person and their ability to live independently, the capacity for social care practitioners to learn new skills or the potential for local grassroots organisations to play a more prominent role.

For example, the council is working with staff, service users and carers to review Care4CE – the council's in house service that provides support for older people



and those with learning difficulties. There are a range of possible delivery models for these services including retaining in-house, staff mutual and commissioning from the private sector. 'It will put a challenge into the market to raise standards and give staff more scope to innovate,' Mark explains. 'There's so much we can do.'

The council is currently re-commissioning the domiciliary market and is using the process to move away from 'time and task' to an outcomes focus.

'We want to see staff paid a fair wage and see investment in the sector, which the council will do,' says Mark. 'It's a journey for our assessment teams and it's about putting the service user in control and being less prescriptive.'

It's a similar story with the care home market. In the course of re-commissioning, the council is forging a new

arrangement with providers that gives the sector more certainty but asks for greater flexibility in return. For example, care homes could offer respite accommodation that's part of a person's package of support and which can be booked in much the same way you would book a holiday.

To make the whole system easier to navigate and to meet Care Act duties, the council has invested in a new website that signposts residents to a wide range of information and support. Launched in 2017, Live

Well has already been highlighted as an example of best practice by public sector IT association Socitm.

The site is now being developed further to enable people to carry out assessments online to find out whether they are eligible for support.

'We have a lot of people who live alone in rural parts of the borough,' Mark explains. 'Families are more dispersed now – this means we must get to people sooner and refer them to support locally.'

It's one of many ways the council is seeking to better understand the make-up of local communities and reach those who might otherwise fall under the radar.

Another example is the Carers' Hub, which has recently been re-commissioned to create an all-age integrated hub providing a single point of contact



for carers, professionals and the community across Cheshire East. It offers access to a range of intervention and services and a route through to other appropriate support and will soon have a permanent base.

Mark says: 'We have 40,000 informal carers in Cheshire East. If we get the carer offer right it will make a big impact on the cared for right across the age range.'

'Where we know we have a carer, we can support them. It's a way of getting to know the carers and reaching out to the community to make sure they have someone to turn to. These are the assets of the borough – people able to help others.'

It's also a prime example of the strong partnership working between the council and its two CCGs, with both having provided funding. With local hospitals

struggling financially, developing new ways of working between the council, CCGs and NHS trusts is essential.

For example, issues around hospital bed blocking have been alleviated through greater flexibility over care packages and closer links between social workers and health practitioners. Official figures show Cheshire East is now in the top quartile of 151 local authority areas in England for avoiding delayed transfers of care (DTOC). 'If we are going to move to an integrated health and social care system it has to be affordable. We're looking at commissioning together on a Cheshire East scale.'

'It's about integrating frontline services so that community services are working with social care services. It's got to be something that works for health and social care, is affordable and delivers desired outcomes.'



## Making the connections

Cheshire East was one of 23 local authorities to pilot a scheme looking at how best to support communities and make the most of the facilities that are available to bring groups together.

After a successful year-long trial in Macclesfield, 'connected communities' has now been rolled out across Cheshire East by the public health team.

It's essentially about tapping into the area's social capital. One of the biggest assets Cheshire East has



at its disposal is a large number of active retirees. Last year the council made £400,000 available



## An extended corporate family

Cheshire East Council is one of the best performing local authorities in the country when it comes to young people not in education, employment or training (NEET).

At just 2.2% it's the third lowest after Harrow and the Isles of Scilly. But 'it's 2.2% too many', says acting chief executive Kath O'Dwyer.

One way the council is driving that figure down is by focusing its efforts on a group of people who too often find their life chances limited - care leavers.

For example, it has set up the Ignition Panel, an innovative programme that's designed to ensure young people have the smoothest transition possible when they leave care.

Run by people with first hand experience of care services, the scheme works with those aged 15 or older and offers practical support to help them think about life as an independent adult, from where they will live to managing finances.

Some 25 young people took part last year with a number living in a semi-independent setting to get used to being in their own property.

But it's also about using the council's reach to become the best corporate parent possible. Cheshire East has an abundance of strong education provision and good employers - all of whom are partners of the council.

'What we're doing is offering them help within the "family business";' says Mark Palethorpe, acting executive director, people.

'It might be apprenticeships or job opportunities in the council or with what you might call 'the aunties and uncles' - our partners, like housing organisations. It's about providing opportunities to develop the skills to get ready for life, not just work life.'

through participatory budgeting, whereby local people were invited to bid for funding for projects that would have a positive impact on their community.

But the programme has a wider aim - to create a network of hubs using everything from church halls to community centres where residents can get a range of information and advice around health and wellbeing.

The idea is to empower and mobilise communities so that they play their part in the overall shift towards early intervention and early help. In Macclesfield alone it has led to activities that increase the independence of older people, raise aspirations and develop skills, and enhance mental wellbeing.

The result is a growing network that's supported by the council but controlled by residents.



# CONSTELLATION

CREATING THE PLACE WHERE EVERYTHING CONNECTS

## DRIVING GROWTH THROUGH TRANSFORMATIONAL HS2 CONNECTIVITY



### The Constellation Partnership

We are a ground-breaking alliance of 7 local authorities and 2 Local Enterprise Partnerships, and already one of the UK's biggest and most vibrant economic areas.

Growth will bring a successful, sustainable future - a region that rises to the challenges of economic change, bringing the best of employment, housing and quality of life for current and future generations.

HS2 will deliver a step change in travel times, transforming access to labour, jobs and housing markets, boosting skills, and increasing rail capacity for local services and freight.

### Delivering our Growth Strategy - from vision into action

Our area is unique and distinctive - with competitive connectivity, world leading education and research bases, exceptional landscapes, and quality of life - from city living to market towns - affordable excellence.

We will grow our area by more than 20% by 2040 - through strong and consistent local leadership, a clear vision and action plan, and the appetite and capacity to deliver innovative and sustainable 'good growth'.

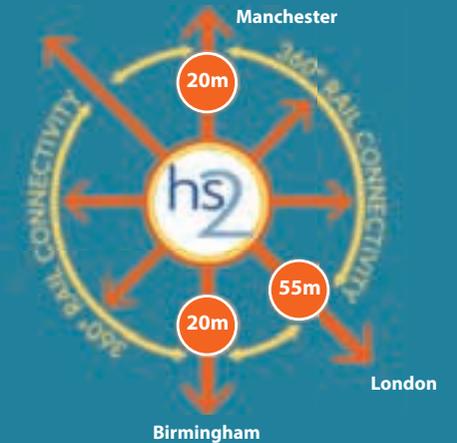
### Existing and Future Journey Times from Key Centres to London



with

a case for a minimum of:  
**5-7 HS2 trains per hour each way from the Crewe Hub and**  
**2 HS2 trains per hour each way from Stoke-on-Trent and Stafford**

### Future journey times from the Crewe Hub



Our Growth Strategy will deliver at least **100,000** new homes and **120,000** new jobs by 2040 with **225,000** more people



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