

Alsager Local Economy and Employment – final draft NP

V7 – 7 September 2018

Objectives

To provide a range of good employment opportunities for local residents, to support local economic development, to encourage investment, and create a balanced local economy that allows new businesses to develop, retains existing businesses and creates an environment for innovative and creative businesses and technologies to locate within the town.

To ensure that new employment developments incorporate best design practices, including for sustainable development and environmental management, and respect their locations.

To facilitate the town centre as a location for small-scale employment, business and investment within the town.

Employment in Alsager

Historically Alsager has had a few large employers, notably the Royal Ordnance Factory (now BAE Systems) making small arms ammunition, Twyfords, Manchester Metropolitan University, and ICL at nearby Kidsgrove. The workforce at the Royal Ordnance Factory reached 15,000 at its peak in WWII, but after the war this was cut to 1500, and now there are just a few hundred employees (though the business is thriving). The other large employers have all disappeared.

Cheshire East settlement profile data shows that Alsager's population has been declining and ageing, with its working age population (16-64) and its economically active population below the Cheshire East average and also declining.

However, with 2000 new houses scheduled to be built in the period to 2030, Alsager is set to start growing again. It is likely that Alsager will continue to be largely a commuter town (2011 census - net outflow of 2,500), given good road and rail networks to local towns such as Crewe, Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme, and to more distant locations such as Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham. The development of HS2 is likely to further facilitate this. Many of the people coming to Alsager to buy the new houses will already have employment for which Alsager is an appropriate residential location.

Nevertheless, we need to provide more employment opportunities within the town so that people have more choice about where they work and how long they spend travelling, and are able to create their own businesses near where they live, particularly taking advantage of the growth of digital businesses. As a growing town there will be a need for additional local services which can form the basis of new businesses. In addition there are opportunities to increase visitor numbers by promoting Alsager's attractions and developing new businesses to take advantage of them. We also need to reduce the environmental impact of employment choices by providing more sustainable local employment opportunities.

Alsager employment sites in Cheshire East Local Plan 2010-2030

A key economic objective within the Cheshire East Local Plan is to identify Crewe as a high growth city in conjunction with the M6 corridor as a key attractor. Alsager's location just 2 miles from Junction 16 of the M6 (and 7 miles from Crewe) is seen to offer significant opportunities for

employment, particularly in the area at Radway Green surrounding the BAE Systems site, which offers direct access to J16 of the M6 without going through the town.

The Alsager Town Map below shows where Cheshire East has designated the key employment sites in Alsager, comprising three sites in the west at Radway Green (RG North, RG Brownfield and RG Extension) and one mixed use site at Twyfords/Cardon in the east of the town. There is a requirement for Alsager to identify 40 hectares of new employment land, and only RG North (12 hectares) and RG Extension (25 hectares - technically outside the Alsager NP boundary but deemed by Cheshire East to be part of Alsager's allocation) contribute to this because the other sites are deemed to be existing employment sites, even though BAE Systems has just released 10 hectares of additional land for the RG Brownfield site. There is therefore a notional shortfall of 3 hectares, but Cheshire East has confirmed in its SADPD document published in August 2018 that no further employment sites will be required from Alsager.

In addition to the sites shown, there is employment at Excalibur Trading Estate (close to the railway station), at White Moss Quarry, and at businesses and other employers in the town centre.

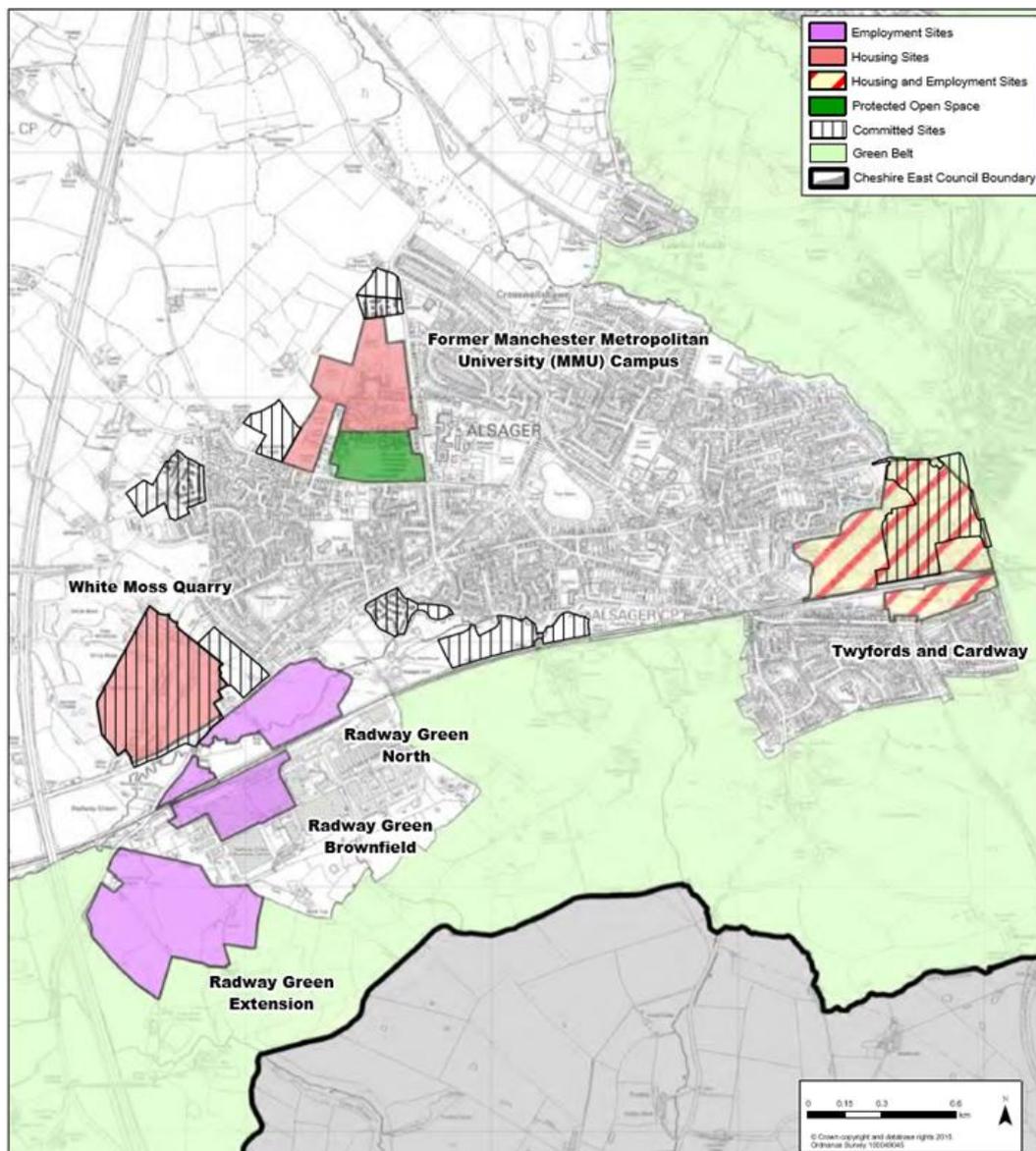


Figure 15.22 Alsager Town Map [from Cheshire East Local Plan]

Alsager Neighbourhood Plan approach to employment sites

The Radway Green area will continue to be the principal employment area of the town, comprising the existing Radway Green Business Park and the three new RG sites identified in the map.

The Business Park is about 12 hectares, managed by Tilstone Holdings (since September 2017), and currently has over 70 companies across a wide range of sectors including distribution, engineering, computing and IT, marketing, home services, health and many others, in a variety of industrial, warehouse, office and managed office space. Demand is buoyant and this will continue to be a valued and protected employment site in accordance with Cheshire East Local Plan policy EG3. Proposals to enable more intensive use of this site will be supported.

Most of these Radway Green sites are appropriate for a full range of business uses (B1 Business, B2 Industrial, and B8 Storage or distribution), and proposals will be supported provided there is compliance with the conditions set out in the Cheshire East Local Plan (high quality design, environment, green infrastructure, archaeology, water management, assessment and management of contaminated land, landscaping, pedestrian and cycle links, parking, contributions to transport and roads improvements). The Radway Green Extension site is within the green belt (currently Duchy of Lancaster land), and particular mitigation will be required at its boundary with the green belt. This site, the one closest to the M6, is already earmarked for significant logistics facilities.

The Radway Green sites are adjacent to the railway line. This is already used by BAE Systems for transporting its freight, and storage and distribution businesses generally should be encouraged to use rail in preference to road transport for freight. Where this is not possible, road freight should be directed away from the town centre towards the M6 and the A500, both accessed via the B5078 from the roundabout at J16. The access to the sites needs to be from the M6 side of the level crossing, not the Alsager side.

The Radway Green North site differs from the other RG sites in a number of ways:

- green field site
- at a major gateway to the town on Crewe Road (B5077)
- attractive vistas to open countryside
- on the town side (not the M6 side) of the level crossing
- the 12ha site includes Valley Brook at its southern end, which is required to have an 8m buffer zone either side (a buffer level already proving inadequate in some places) - Valley Brook is a main river receiving runoff from current and new development and so at flood risk, significantly reducing the area of usable land, and no land south of Valley Brook can be used for development

The Local Plan also specifies the following for this site in paragraph 15.316:

The incorporation of green infrastructure, notably trees and hedgerows, together with sensitive design in terms of the scale and massing of any new structures, has the potential to mitigate any potential adverse impacts on visual amenity from the main public vantage points. This will also assist in enhancing the environment of the local area, and improving the health and wellbeing of employees.

Additionally it should be noted that the site is within the outer blast zone from BAE Systems which further restricts the type of development which is appropriate.

We do not therefore see it as part of the M6 logistics corridor and would support proposals to treat this site differently to the other RG employment sites, focusing on small scale, low rise units providing high value jobs, particularly for small start up companies. Requirements are set out in policy E1 (3) below.

Since these RG sites are adjacent to one another and are becoming available at the same time, we would expect to see a high level Master Plan for all the sites, showing how they are designed, linked and coordinated. It is important that all development on these sites takes advantage of good design using sustainable development principles for energy and water usage. The Blue Planet building in Chatterley Valley is an example of what can be achieved from good design. Details of what the Master Plan should include are set out in policy E1 (1) below.

The Twyfords/Cardway site is to be a mixed development of housing and employment, with planning permission already granted also for a large supermarket development. About 3,000 sq m of existing office development in the Twyfords part of the site has been retained for employment purposes. However, it is recognised that this site should not have long term protection for employment use if suitable proposals are not forthcoming. Suitable employment uses would be for offices only (B1) since the site is to be surrounded by housing.

The Excalibur Industrial Estate is a current employment site of ? hectares with about 5 companies, one relatively large (Jarrobs sheet metal manufacturing, which has been on the site for over 30 years), and some vacant units. One large factory has recently gone into administration which will leave this part of the site vacant. The site access is through a short residential area from Sandbach Road South, and the site is on the edge of a residential area, but mostly it is surrounded by open land and abuts the Twyfords site. It will continue to be protected for employment purposes, in accordance with Cheshire East Local Plan policy EG3.

Development of space in the town centre for employment purposes will be permitted as set out in policies TC3 and TC4.

Alsager employment strategy

The Neighbourhood Plan will aim to increase access to local employment for local people, encouraging the growth of small businesses including homeworking, protecting and improving current employment areas, and developing new designated employment sites.

According to the Alsager Household Survey, 42% of respondents are employed, 28% self-employed, 9% unemployed and 23% retired. This demonstrates a high level of self-employment, with people running their own small businesses, and the survey analysis showed that there was strong support for a policy to support new small-scale employment opportunities within the town. The Neighbourhood Plan would wish to support this. The Cheshire East Economic Profile (March 2018) identifies that Alsager has one of the lowest job densities in Cheshire East - this means that there are many fewer jobs available in Alsager than people of working age (16-64). It is therefore important to develop employment sites within the town, to provide good quality jobs.

Alsager East includes an area of multiple deprivation as defined by the 2015 indices, with particularly low scores relating to education, skills and training. The scores are lower for young people than adults. It is therefore important specific measures are taken to enhance the education, skills and training of all young people in Alsager, and to encourage greater connections between local schools and employers, in order to enable them all to gain good employment, in Alsager or elsewhere.

Alsager is an attractive town where people want to live and work, as demonstrated by the Household Survey. When developing employment sites we need to ensure that this is not jeopardised. Therefore larger businesses and those with many vehicle movements need to be located on the periphery of the town, and preferably on the Radway Green sites on the south side of the railway line giving direct access either to rail transport or to the M6. This location is good for attracting a range of logistics and distribution businesses, but many of these businesses do not offer a large number of well-paid jobs in relation to the floor space occupied, and they generate significant HGV vehicular movements. Since RG Extension is already earmarked for logistics facilities there is a preference for attracting engineering and manufacturing jobs to the remaining sites.

We need to diversify the economy and are particularly keen to facilitate the location and development of small start-up businesses in the town, providing high value well paid employment.

Cheshire East has already identified that creative and digital businesses can be a growth factor in the region and has put in place a strategy to support this. In particular they identified key barriers to growth, barriers likely to affect all small start-up businesses:

- low levels of entrepreneurship
- lack of innovation support
- lack of access to finance and commercial business skills
- shortage of smaller offices or incubator space

Many new businesses are likely to provide services to meet the requirements of an expanding and ageing population, and others will build on Alsager's legacy of its cultural community. We also want to see Alsager become a place for people who make things - Alsager artisans. Typical sectors are likely to include:

- computer, IT and digital
- artistic and creative, including digital creativity
- marketing and promotion
- professional services
- health and wellbeing
- small scale hi tech manufacturing
- renewable energy
- workshops for making anything - food, furniture, engineered products, clothes
- horticulture and agriculture
- social and community-led enterprises
- tourism and visitor attractions and services

In order to facilitate this we would like to see the development of appropriate, small, high quality units, many with cooperative workshop space, and maker space, so that the initial business costs are not prohibitive. Fast broadband needs to be provided across the plan area. There is a need to encourage inward investment to make some of this happen.

The town centre is planned as a mixed use hub of the community, to include employment and business opportunities. Community events are a key visitor attraction, together with the town's rural setting and pathway network, and range of cafes, restaurants and pubs. The development of businesses related to encouraging and supporting visitors to Alsager will be supported.

Self-employment and home working will also be supported. Proposals to develop live-work units within new residential developments will be supported, together with the appropriate adaptation of current residential premises to accommodate home working offices and studios.

Alsager also has a rural economy, principally the Alsager Golf Club, the garden centre and a number of farms. The principal approach will be to support current businesses to thrive while restricting inappropriate new development in the open countryside and preventing any further incursion into the green belt.

The Cheshire East Skills and Growth company, and the Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership will both be invited to help develop a strategy for bringing good quality jobs to Alsager.

Policies

E1 New designated employment sites

It should be noted that these policies have been discussed with, and are fully supported by, Barthomley Parish Council which is the civic authority within which some of the Radway Green employment sites are located. The Radway Green employment sites are therefore included within the plan area of the Alsager Neighbourhood Plan so that the policies set out here will apply to all these employment sites. [to be confirmed]

1 The Cheshire East Local Plan identifies the following new employment sites for Alsager: Radway Green Extension, Radway Green Brownfield and Radway Green North. Together with the existing Radway Green Business Park employment site they are all adjacent to one another. No specific plans for these sites will be supported unless a high level Master Plan for the totality of the space has first been created, to show how the sites are linked and coordinated, and specifying requirements of enabling infrastructure. The Master Plan should identify in particular:

- improved road access to the site from the B5078
- a single point of access to the whole Radway Green employment site (other than Radway Green North) on the south of the railway
- possibilities for the current Radway Green Business Park to be integrated in order to future proof the overall site
- design and signage requirements to ensure that large vehicular traffic is directed away from the town centre and towards the M6/A500
- access routes within and between the sites (roads, footpaths, cycle ways, bus stops)
- coordinated car parking
- access to the railway line for freight movement
- infrastructure for superfast broadband connections (see also policy T10)
- water and sewage management and drainage
- quality of design and landscaping, including addressing climate change issues with sustainable energy and water use
- ongoing responsibility for landscape maintenance
- enhanced gateway to the town

In addition the Master Plan should be designed so that any future requirement to re-open the station at Radway Green should not be made impossible.

2 Proposals for new business on the Radway Green Extension and Radway Green Brownfield sites will be supported provided there is compliance with the conditions set out in the Cheshire East Local Plan (high quality design, environment, green infrastructure, archaeology, water management, assessment and management of contaminated land, landscaping, pedestrian and cycle links, parking, contributions to transport and roads improvements). The Radway Green Extension site is within the green belt, and particular mitigation will be required at its boundary with the green belt.

3 Given the location and nature of the Radway Green North site, only proposals which respect the nature and character of the site will be supported. In particular proposals will be required to:

- be well designed and landscaped, set back from the road (B5077 Crewe Road), and still provide an attractive gateway to the town
- designed sensitively in terms of the scale and massing of any new structures
- include only small scale, low rise units
- preserve as far as possible the vista to the open countryside
- provide small employment units together with cooperative workshop facilities, including for (a) artistic and creative businesses, (b) hi-tech electronics manufacturing, and (c) offices for small start-up IT businesses
- develop green infrastructure along Valley Brook at the south of the site

E2 New business

Proposals which extend existing, or promote new, employment opportunities within the plan area will be supported where it can be demonstrated that:

- The development will positively benefit the local economy and provide opportunities for local employment and training
- It is not located outside the settlement boundary unless it complies with policy E4 (see also policy OS8)
- It does not have an adverse impact upon the character and appearance of the locality or the local amenity
- It does not have an adverse impact on identified environmental assets or lead to loss of open space or green infrastructure
- It does not have a detrimental impact on local watercourses or cause local flooding
- It supports improved broadband speeds and access
- All business development must include adequate car parking, but will be encouraged to manage down their need for employee and visitor parking over the plan period by the introduction of travel plans and encouraging the use of sustainable transport modes
- Proposals must not increase vehicular movements through Alsager town centre
- Proposals are located close to existing highways and do not have an unacceptable impact on traffic
- Proposals for distribution and storage facilities which are likely to generate significant amounts of freight which could realistically be moved by rail will only be permitted on sites which have, or economically could be provided with, access to a railway
- They link into safe, attractive and convenient pedestrian and cycle routes

- Any new employment development takes advantage of existing public transport routes within the town

E3 Loss of employment sites

Loss of existing local employment sites will only be supported where it can be demonstrated that the existing use is no longer viable or required and the premises/site/business has been actively marketed for at least 2 years at an appropriate market price.

E4 Re-use of existing buildings

The re-use, conversion and adaptation of permanent, structurally sound buildings of substantial construction for small business, farm diversification, recreation or tourism will be supported subject to:

- The proposal being appropriate to its location
- The conversion and/or adaptation works proposed respecting the local character of the surrounding buildings and area
- The local highway network being capable of accommodating the traffic generated by the proposed new use and adequate car parking being provided within the site
- Compliance with all other relevant policies in the neighbourhood plan

E5 Home working

Proposals to support home working will be supported as follows:

- Where adequate space permits, conversion of rooms or creation of additional rooms as extensions to houses, or construction or conversion of ancillary buildings such as detached garages, for office or studio space to facilitate home working, subject to adequate environmental and amenity protection for the neighbourhood character and that of the adjacent properties
- The creation of live work units within new residential developments

(See also policy H1-6)

E6 Scale, design and amenity

All new employment development must be of a high quality of design which:

- Complements and enhances where appropriate the size, height, scale, mass, materials, layout, access and density of existing adjoining development, and complies with the Cheshire East Design Guide
- Demonstrates high sustainability and environmental standards by utilising building and landscaping techniques to create low-carbon or zero-carbon buildings, rainwater capture, green roofs, and creation of wildlife habitats
- Facilitates provision of high speed broadband and other communication networks
- Demonstrates that the amenities of neighbouring dwellings will not be adversely affected through overlooking, loss of light or outlook, over dominance or general disturbance

- Provides an appropriate level of landscaping which complements and enhances the rural character of the local area
- Provides on-site car parking that meets the needs of the prospective occupiers
- Avoids or minimises light pollution

E7 Employment opportunities in the town centre

The town centre is planned to become a vibrant hub of the community with mixed use including business and employment of an appropriate scale. Proposals for new businesses within the town centre will be subject in addition to policies TC3 and TC4.

Evidence and justification

Cheshire East Local Plan 2010-2030 (July 2017)

- (1) Site-specific development principles for the Radway Green designated employment sites
- (2) Strategic priority 2 - Creating sustainable communities, where all members are able to contribute and where all the infrastructure required to support the community is provided

Including:

4. Improving links between existing and new neighbourhoods by giving priority to walking, cycling and public transport and providing a genuine choice of transport modes and supporting community integration.

5. Ensuring that all new development is well designed, has regard to local character and context, and is sustainable and energy efficient.

- (3) Strategic priority 3 - Protecting and enhancing environmental quality

Including:

3. Reducing the borough's impact on climate change by:

- i. sustainable patterns of development;
- ii. prudently managing natural resources;
- iii. promoting renewable energy;
- iv. encouraging water efficiency;
- v. using energy efficiently; and
- vi. avoiding developing land that may be at risk from the effects of climate change.

- (4) Strategic priority 4 - Reducing the need to travel, managing car use and promoting more sustainable modes of transport and improving the road network

Including:

2. Ensuring development gives priority to walking, cycling and public transport in its design.

- (5) Policy EG1 - Economic prosperity
- (6) Policy EG3 - Existing and allocated employment sites
- (7) Policy SD2 - Sustainable Development principles
- (8) Policy SE1 - Sustainable Environment design

Including:

1. Sense of place

- i. Ensuring design solutions achieve a sense of place by protecting and enhancing the quality, distinctiveness and character of settlements;
- ii. Ensuring sensitivity of design in proximity to designated and local heritage assets and their settings;
- v. Encouraging innovative and creative design solutions that are appropriate to the local context;

2. Managing design quality

- i. Ensuring for larger scale and more complex developments that design proposals have positively responded to the Design Review process;
- ii. Ensuring for major developments that Masterplanning and Design Coding forms an integral part of the design process;

3. Sustainable urban, architectural and landscape design

- i. Encouraging the introduction of passive environmental design principles and climate change adaptation features in the orientation of buildings and spaces and detailed design;
- ii. Encouraging sustainable modes of travel through appropriate design;
- iii. Reducing energy and water usage through appropriate design;
- iv. Encouraging the use of renewable/low carbon energy technology, as appropriate; and
- v. Encouraging the use of green infrastructure.

- (9) Policy CO1 - Sustainable travel and transport
- (10) Policy CO3 - Digital connections
- (11) Policy CO4 - Travel plans and transport assessments

Cheshire East Design Guide (January 2016)

A Review of the Creative and Digital Sector in Cheshire East (May 2015)

Settlement profile for Alsager in CELP

Cheshire East Economic Profile (March 2018)

Indices of Multiple Deprivation - Cheshire East (2015)

Alsager Household Survey (January 2018)

Alsager Town Centre Business Survey (February 2018)

Notes from meeting with Adrian Fisher, Cheshire East Planning Officer, 12 July 2017

Example of sustainable logistics building from Blue Planet building in Chatterley Valley, Newcastle-under-Lyme

Draft Delivery Plan

Ref	Requirements	Responsibility / Comments
1	Master Plan for RG sites	Cheshire East Planning Office Alsager Town Council Barthomley Parish Council
2	Improve connections between Alsager schools and employers	Alsager schools CEC Skills and Growth company CEC Cultural Economy team
3	Develop a strategy to attract small businesses and good quality jobs to Alsager	Alsager Town Council Cheshire East Skills and Growth company

		Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership
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