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Dear Sir

Local Plan Preferred Development Options

Firstly, I wish to make comment on the consultation itself, in particular the timing of the consultation and nature of drop in sessions. To hold such an important public consultation at a time when residents are on summer holidays, schools are closed and Parish Councils are not meeting shows some degree of contempt for the consultation process and residents. Having attempted to attend the Lymm drop in session, [REDACTED] finally gave up having waited outside after 45 minutes [REDACTED] [REDACTED] she then went back to the Village Hall later in the evening to find an even longer queue to get in, a chaotic event with too many people, insufficient explanation of the proposed plans and nobody to answer questions. The event could have been held over several days, allowing everybody time to review the plans and ask questions in a less hurried and calmer environment.

I attended the Park Royal event, I went first at 4pm and drove away as the queue stretched across the car park. I returned at 6pm and I queued for 50 minutes and saw many people walk into the car park, look at the queues and walk away again. Parking was almost impossible with the Hotel also busy with guests and users of the Health Club. Council officers made attempts to get those in the queue into the exhibition at the end of the evening but there were many more who decided not to wait in a queue of at least 100 people at any one time. Inside, I could not get to talk to anybody from the planning department as there were far too many people waiting to ask questions. There was no signage to show what was on each display board and the information for outlying settlements was hidden away at the bottom of a board. Again, given the interest and experience at the Lymm event I do not understand why the Council did not extend the drop in period to a number of days to accommodate as wider cross section of residents as possible.

Given the steps that some developers have already taken, distributing leaflets to households to press their case for a development area, I am surprised that the Local Authority has not taken steps to leaflet widely across the Borough to provide informed and simple guidance on the process and proposals under consultation. Communicating directly with residents to inform them of what's being proposed and ways to comment would have been a worthy exercise. I also made numerous attempts to call the planning department using the number provided for enquiries into the local plan. Each time I tried I received a message saying I required a PIN number to access the service.

Having now had the opportunity to review the Preferred Development Options documents and supporting materials I feel that documents are not written in a simple manner, they are full of difficult acronyms, cross references to other documents, abbreviations and technical terms which makes reading them a challenge for anyone who isn't familiar with this type of document. I could find no summary documents which outline key points for consideration and some of the questions on the online questionnaire are overly technical, off putting and difficult to answer. As neither a Town planner nor a Statistician, I do not feel sufficiently knowledgeable to make detailed comment about methodology used in calculating future employment land needs. Perhaps there could have been a questionnaire for residents and another for developers and corporate organisations looking to challenge the LA's approach?

I now wish to make the following comments with regards to the council's proposals:

There is a need for some development in and around Warrington, particularly in the Town Centre and I applaud Warrington Council's ambitious vision for the future economic development of the area but - the scale of proposed housing development appears to be excessive. The aspiration to become a New City has not been well communicated and the scheme now appears to be solely linked to the development of 24,000 additional homes across Warrington and the destruction of the Green Belt.

Looking at housing forecast, taking the data in the SHMA document for Warrington which shows population growth of around 11% then we can expect to see Warrington's population increase by around 25,000 people over the next 20 years to 2037, and if the 'people per home' figure, used in the area profiles of 2.3 is used, then the increase in new homes needed is closer to 11,000. Based on this analysis there is sufficient 'brownfield' sites to avoid significant encroachment into the Green belt. 24,000 homes would suggest that Warrington is expecting either a significant change in the average people per home figure or a population growth much higher than 11%, both of which appear unlikely.

The council acknowledges that much of the work carried out for the consultation document is connected to the development of the 'City Centre' and the Garden City Suburb, however I wish to make some observations related to proposed development in the Lymm area.

Given my earlier comments with regards to calculations for the number of new homes needed in the Borough, I would much prefer that most of the development be undertaken in and around the main Warrington urban area. I do not agree that 500 additional homes should be built in Lymm as most of land parcels fall into the Green Belt. There is real need to maintain the open green space between Oughtrington and Lymm, Thelwall and Lymm and Broomedge and Lymm where distinct villages exist. Many of the people who live in Lymm decided to do so because of its village feel and adding a further 500 homes would change the character of the place.

The area profile for Lymm identifies limited capacity at all four primaries and the secondary school within the village and that the local surgeries are at capacity, anecdotally getting an appointment at Brookfield surgery usually means a wait of at least 2-3 weeks. Of equal relevance is the road infrastructure through the village, where, because of the Manchester Ship Canal and Bridgewater Canal a small number of roads carry a high volume of traffic due to crossing points. When the M6 is blocked the village becomes completely gridlocked. At peak times, roads such as Rushgreen Road are a constant stream of vehicles heading through Lymm. Parking is already a major problem in the village which hampers road flow. At the other end of the village the Toll over Warburton Bridge slows traffic and causes huge delays.

Rushgreen Road is very narrow in places, has intermittent pavements and cannot accommodate two large vehicles passing in several places near to the village centre without the use of the pavement. Consideration must be given to the location of future housing development and the consequences of adding additional vehicles to this overly busy route. Any development should take place on the western side of the village, close to the M6/M56 junctions to give easy access to these principal routes.

Lymm's bus service is limited at peak times to a through service once every 30 minutes, there is no tram or train service within a 15-minute car journey. Deciding to set up home in an outlying settlement like Lymm is highly likely to be made by people who can drive and who won't want to rely entirely on public transport.

The consultation document refers to the release of Green Belt in easing congestion in the town centre by the fact that it unlocks 'strategic infrastructure'. This is a nonsense argument – building homes on the Green Belt in Lymm will make no difference to traffic in the middle of Warrington at 9am – indeed it is likely to add to the problem as people living in Lymm use their cars to get about because public transport is scarce when compared with services for those in the Warrington urban area.

I am disappointed that the council has not completed and posted area assessments for land submitted for development in Lymm. It would have been helpful to know which areas were likely to be looked on as favourably. Given that this work has not taken place yet, it is crucial that the views of residents are taken into consideration through the Parish Council's Local Development Scheme and that the Local Plan has provision or scope to include Village Design Statements along with the other Supplementary Planning Documents.

I want to see Lymm maintained and developed as a thriving village community with a range of local service (including a bank and a Post Office which have recently disappeared from the village) so limited development, in the right area should be permitted but this should be development which is in character with the village, unlike recent estates where the 3 storey buildings are not in keeping with the rest of the area.

With the experiences gained from this round of consultation I very much hope that the council will approach the next stage of consultation in a different manner, with better prepared events to cope with the understandable interest from residents into the future of this area.

Yours faithfully

