

Response to Warrington Borough Council Preferred Development Option/Local Plan.

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27 Sept 2017

As a resident of Stockton Heath [REDACTED] I wish to express my strong opposition to the Preferred Development Option (PDO) put forward by Warrington Borough Council (WBC).

The communication process adopted by WBC has been appalling. WBC has been either amateurish in its approach, or devious. If this plan is as important as WBC say it is for the future of Warrington, then every household in the town should have received a communication directly. This is because everyone will be affected in some way.

Many folk still not know that the Plan exists because they have not been informed directly. Not everyone reads the local press or is on Facebook, or sees plans pinned on a gate in the countryside. I was informed by seeing posters placed along the route of my daily walks into the Grappenhall and Appleton countryside, not by WBC, but concerned residents.

If WBC really want to put a plan forward then they should have consulted first with the residents of Warrington as to what kind of town they want to live in before putting a proposal forward. They should have been involved in the process from the beginning. I certainly do not wish to live in a city and I object most strongly to WBC adopting this as their aim without it being put to the people they supposedly represent. Neither do I want to live in an area which is over-developed to the extent proposed.

Warrington is not a suitable location for further significant development. With its major river, ocean-going canal and historic leisure canal cutting across the borough in an east-west direction, it presents far too many transport obstacles which can only be solved by expensive projects involving the destruction of existing property and valued green spaces or greenbelt. If development was done on a regional basis rather than on a local town basis then a much better planning outcome would result with the focus on areas that are best suited.

Regarding the PDO documentation, it is vague and poorly presented for the purposes of communicating with the public. The documentation on the WBC website may meet all the legal requirements but it is not user friendly and is gobbledygook to most folk. There is a massive amount of planning jargon and abbreviations are used too much which does not lend itself to easy understanding for the "layman member of public". Most of the maps are unclear and cannot be read. There have not been enough public meetings and many have not been able to get into the few held locally. By the time I discovered the existence of the PDO, the meetings remaining were at times could not attend. The whole consultation has been rushed through.

With regard to the Road Infrastructure, the PDO supporting data is flawed in many respects particularly with regard to South Warrington. There is inadequate analysis of :

- current motor vehicle traffic flows and volumes
- the impact of motorway closures on the roads of Warrington
- the impact on the existing road network of all the extras residents' vehicles, light goods vehicles (couriers etc) and presumably more buses.

The issue of car parking in Stockton Heath has been ignored in spite of this being an important retail and leisure area of the borough which will attract significantly more vehicles as a result of the PDO.

The proposed Western Link will not benefit traffic heading north/north west from the A49 or A50. There are no suitable routes through Stockton Heath from/to these roads to the A56 at Walton. So the majority of traffic added as a result of additional property in South Warrington will just add to the A49 or A50 or A5061 or Cantilever Bridge.

Buses are not the answer. The vast majority of the South Warrington population would never use buses. If WBC were really forward thinking about infrastructure then why hasn't a light rail or tram network been put forward as a future option ? This would be much more likely to attract this population and get people out of their cars.

The PDO hardly mentions cycling. There is no significant statement or plan as to how cycling will be promoted as "Active Transport". WBC have never created a safe cycling network within South Warrington with the exception of the few associated with the newer development around Grappenhall Heys. WBC has never seen this through and linked these cycle ways into the main thoroughways e.g. down to Lumb Brook Bridge. Furthermore there is no safe cycling network directly from the south to north towards the town centre area. I have no faith in WBC having the vision or willingness to see safe cycling routes being established throughout Warrington.

The Green Belt should be preserved, housing development should be limited and before anything happens the pathetic infrastructure that exists at present should be improved before adding more new roads.

The Green Belt assessment shows a wanton disregard for the impact on wildlife and understates the importance of agricultural land and hedgerows to the character of the country landscape which separates the villages and residential areas.

My concern is that the destruction of South Warrington's green belt and particularly the arable farming in the Grappenhall/Appleton areas will kill off the local population of yellow hammers which I see and hear regularly on my daily walks in those areas. These are on "red listed" by the R.S.P.B. They are urgently threatened birds which have suffered greatly due to changes in land management, the removal of hedgerows and other non cropped features resulting in a massive loss of available food. The PDO perpetuates this for the species and other locally present seed feeders such as house sparrows and linnets.

Also the healthy population of buzzards would suffer dramatically given that they are a good bellwether of the state of wildlife further down the food chain. The summer visitors, in particular swifts, swallows and house martins, to all the open areas of South Warrington would be adversely affected too and a big loss of our enjoyment to the countryside.

If WBC think that just by retaining a few strips of woodland e.g. Dingle, Ford's Rough, and creating yet another artificial country park in WA4 that will answer all the wildlife concerns, this just shows how ignorant they are with regard to environmental matters.

Furthermore, no attempt has been made consider the impact on residents' lives and well-being on having Green Belt areas so close to built up areas such as Stockton Heath which has no significant green areas. If this is lost on the scale proposed then I and many others will get in our cars, and "clog up" the roads even more so that we can get to the countryside. I do not want to have to walk through two miles more of housing estates before I get to the countryside. I am not interested in being limited to a man-made country park for my exercise and enjoyment of the open countryside, its fresh air, views and experience of seeing and hearing wildlife. The green belt land may be farmed but there is an important network of public footpaths across this land.

For the next 10 years WBC should concentrate on sorting out the poor state of Warrington as it is now. This includes sorting the social problems it undoubtedly has. Effort needs to be put into consolidating what has been done already without opening up a new "can of worms" as per the Preferred Development Option.

In the inner urban areas, the poorer parts, as defined by the Plan, should have a regeneration of the housing stock and capital funds spent on improvement projects. Developing in south Warrington isn't going to help the poorer areas one bit. They won't get any attention if South Warrington is being developed, although it is very clear that WBC use south Warrington as a "cash cow" from its council tax and car parking income.

Warrington town centre is a mess and so uninviting. There are odd buildings here and there as a result of demolition and sporadic development separated by areas of wasteland. Look at the centre with a critical eye and you see the decline. There has been no consistent style of new buildings and approaching the town centre from the south one is now faced with the monstrosity that is the new market multi storey car park with looks like a thrown together pile of rusty wheels and concrete. Seeing this together with the bottom end of Bridge Street, Priory House and the Job Centre does not give visitors any positive impression to make them want to visit the town centre. If WBC feel there needs to be more affordable housing and people want city life, then build in the spaces in the town centre Demolish poorer standard buildings and re-build as apartments/town houses.

Finally, the focus of a Local Plan should be primarily on the quality of life it gives its residents, not just economic gain. I believe that the PDO should be scrapped and the entire process re-done with involvement of residents from the beginning to ensure aims are all agreed up front and an acceptable Local Plan put together. If WBC truly represent the folk of Warrington they will get this message loud and clear and act on it.