

Planning Policy Team
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Dear Sir

Local Plan Review

I have read the Local Plan Review. There is a bewildering amount of information so please excuse the following comments and questions if they have already been addressed in the published literature.

1. I guess the starting point for the review is the predicted number of houses which will be needed over the next 20 years. I imagine that your approach is a standardised one all councils use, but have you considered a changing demographic where youngsters stay with their parents longer because they cannot afford a home of their own. So instead of your multiplier being 2.35 perhaps 2.3 or less would give a number more in tune with social changes, especially over 20 years.
2. With the political changes that Brexit will bring, are there two possible consequences? One might be that recent arrivals from Europe will return and others will be deterred from coming in the first place. A recent census shows that the % of 'White British' has fallen from around 96% to about 92%. Could that 4% segment represent a potential reduction of housing need in years to come?
3. For the North West as a whole I believe that there is a general reduction in population (towards the SE). Knowsley and Sefton show a marked decline. If the much vaunted Northern Powerhouse starts to gain credence (recently boosted by statements from Phillip Hammond) is there an argument to suggest that money can be redirected to these councils to rebuild their communities, and in so doing relieve the pressure on other areas eg Warrington. It would become a swathe of support for others.

Your analyses of how the housing problems might be solved consider 3 scenarios. The first is 'incremental growth' which you tend to dismiss because it does not support the aspiration of city status. (Some would argue that 'city status' would be vanity project in comparison to, say, optimising health needs). If you were to

consider more seriously an incremental approach then all the points made above could be incorporated in a positive way especially if they were looked at within a strategic framework.

Even if the required number of houses is reduced, I imagine there will always be some need. To what extent have you considered brown field sites; and I use brown field in a broad sense. To start with there are many unoccupied premises in and around the town centre. We hear that town centres are dying. Is Warrington any different with the number of empty properties clearly evident. The much vaunted success of Warrington does not seem to translate to facts on the ground. The Department for Communities and Local Government commissioned Mary Portas in 2011 to recommend strategies to halt the decline of town centres.

Here are her recommendations

Portas Review main recommendations:

- Improve management of High Streets with new "town teams" (interested groups that have funding control)
- Affordable town centre car parking
- "Town centre first" approach in planning
- Disincentives for landlords who leave shops empty
- Greater inclusion of the High Street in neighbourhood planning

What an opportunity this Local Plan Review (LPR) could be, to reverse that trend by converting empty premises into accommodation of some form. The access to transport is ideal with the nearby rail links and bus station, retail shops and supermarkets. Will the BHS site remain closed; will the M&S site remain closed; will all the other empty premises continue to blight the town centre? Instead of being part of the problem they could become part of an active solution. Have you used the five recommendations above as key pointers in the LPR and if not why not? To get this right is more important than to aspire to city status.

Other brown field sites would include old industrial premises and landfill sites and potentially Fiddlers Ferry. You will be aware that old landfill sites have been used for housing elsewhere in the NW and also Nationally. While you may argue that Risley Moss, Gatewarth or Arpley Meadows are too fresh now, in 10 years time such sites could be engineered to support housing. Arpley would be close to the Western Link ; as I say it has already been done before. If you were to consider development incrementally then this would fit well. I recognise that such development would perhaps cost more; developers would want an easy ride but were you ultimately to release green belt land perhaps you could insist on land swaps; for each hectare of green belt you would want, say, 5 hectares of brown (or other value recommended by Environmental Economists). Presumably you have ascribed an economic value to each hectare of green belt land, including its intangible amenity and environmental value, so that were you to sacrifice it at least you would know its complete

worth.(The Department for Communities and Local Government report in February 2015 gives tables of basic land values as a starting point). What would be the worst outcome are large developments on the outskirts of Warrington which are never occupied as happened in Ireland after the financial crash and in Spain where visitor numbers never materialised eg near Malaga and even the London Dome where predictions of usage were embarrassingly inaccurate. If this dystopian vision were to occur we would not have a Garden City Suburb but a wasteland. Please don't use 'Garden City Suburb' as a euphemism for urban sprawl. We would want more Letchworth and less Skelmersdale.

Has the LPR integrated Warrington's Health needs? It states that for males in Warrington life expectancy is 9 years less than Nationally and 8.5 years less for females; 68% of people in Warrington are obese; one third are physically inactive. The LPR is silent about how it will address these fundamental issues (it is more than just building a GP's surgery)-and they are surely more important than city status. For example it could plan for fully integrated cycle paths as in the Netherlands.

These are some of the recommendations of the Public Health Strategic Plan for Warrington 2016-2020. How does the LPR integrate them?

4. Recommendations for inclusive growth in Warrington

- **We need to capitalise on the opportunities presented by the future development in the town. To do this we have to proactively design in health' and ensure that new housing estates, industries and district centres promote health and reduce inequalities. (my italics)**
- **We need to maximise the opportunities of the planning processes to improve and develop the necessary infrastructure for health and wellbeing, and for neighbourhood renewal. We want to create vibrant district centres with integrated hubs offering essential community facilities and care and wellness services; accessible through active travel to local communities.**
- **We need to work with local businesses, schools and training providers to scale up the Work and Health programme. We want to work with the public sector and other employers in the town to commit to the principles of the Workplace Wellbeing Charter. We want our local residents to benefit from the borough's economic growth and access the jobs and leisure opportunities in the growing town. We want to make sure that the aspiration for health and prosperity reaches all residents across the borough wherever they live**
- **We need to ensure that our aspirations for the regeneration of our most deprived neighbourhoods in central Warrington links with the town centre masterplan. We want to foster a sense of community ownership of the new facilities to reduce risk of antisocial behaviour in the town centre.**

The LPR shows a 'potential to provide a new strategic road' from Latchford towards Thelwall (Fig7). It is a bit vague and difficult to define its exact path but it seems to pirate the space of the TransPennine Trail, a much used recreational route for walkers, horseriders, runners and cyclists. I assume that if the TPT is lost there will be a like for like replacement. Interestingly later on in the LPR the 'potential' is lost in favour of a more definite proposal Para 5.34 and Figure 10. If this is a more definite plan then you should specify it more clearly as a courtesy to those likely to be affected.

To summarise, my main concern is that the predicted growth in population is too high. It does not take into account reductions which Brexit could precipitate, indeed the Government has promised significant reductions in immigration. I cannot find anywhere in your analyses any allowance for this possibility. To address this uncertainty, an incremental approach is a better, within a strategic framework, which concentrates on invigorating the town centre and recognising health as a key lever.

Yours faithfully

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