

Preferred development option comment

First I apologise for not getting this response in until the eleventh hour. Second I must express many thanks to all concerned, in the Planning and other departments of the Council, for the courteous and charming way in which they have handled such a huge amount of work in connection with this consultation. They have expressed immense patience in the face of tons of feedback, not all of it courteous or properly informed. My prayers and good wishes continue for all concerned as the huge response workload is processed.

The plans in the preferred option are, on the whole, sound, and represent a constructive and practical approach to the meeting of future development need. The prospect of garden city suburbs is particularly attractive. But more work is required on the detail, and above all, a much more visionary approach to future transport provision is needed. This should be based on the prime mover of people around the borough in the future being a light rapid transit system. It is time for Warrington to plan for trams. The first generation system, abandoned in 1935, was good as far as it went (not very far by modern standards) but we are now in the era of modern tram systems and the potential exists for Warrington to have a large and extensive network.

The "low level" railway route through the town has the potential of being the springboard and one of the core routes of such a system. Both the portion of the route already closed to trains, and that still in railway use, should have its potential as a linear transport route preserved.

As regards the closed portion, I:

suggested in a letter published in the Warrington Guardian of 25 October 1985 that it could become part of a rapid transit system;

objected (for what it was worth) in about 1995 to so much of the motorway viaduct widening related works as now obstruct the route in Lymm;

engaged in correspondence with the late Councillor Barbara Mawer in 1996 and 1997 about the then threatened removal of part of the railway embankment and the proposal for demolition of Latchford Viaduct;

objected in June 1998 to an application by British Railways Board for removal of some of the disused railway embankment.

I can supply copies of my end of this correspondence if desired.

Unfortunately, I missed the opportunity in c.1990 to object to the applications to Trafford Borough Council for demolition of Broadheath Viaduct and the bridge over the Bridgewater Canal; the removal of these structures, which subsequently occurred, would make reopening for heavy rail difficult, but would not preclude restoration as light rail.

I regret that much more recently I missed noticing the housing development proposal, which would involve destruction of the embankment and most of the bridges through Latchford, under ref. R 18/104 (the full documents for which are under that reference in the "Call for Sites" section of the documents referred to in the current consultation) and which I understand is now at the stage of scoping proposals by the intending developer; but it would

be my intention to object to the full planning application for this development, if and when it is made. Again, my objection would be solely on the ground that it would be wrong to destroy a useful linear transport route with heavy or light rail potential.

In the present consultation document, the proposal in the plan on page 40 to use part of the formation, from Latchford Village, over Latchford Viaduct and through to beyond Stockport Road overbridge (all this being part of the length of the "potential... new strategic road / public transport route) is objectionable if it be preclusive to restoration of the whole route, including onwards toward Lymm and Broadheath, for either heavy or light rail.

The open portion of the line still in heavy rail use, from the end of what is now termed the Latchford Siding through Arpley Junction and eastwards to Ditton Junction, is now very quiet since Fiddlers Ferry Power Station went into a much lower level of use. But it will obviously continue to be required for so long as the power station remains to any degree operational, and I guess that it will be required to remain an important backup to keeping the lights on for some time. Should it eventually close, the potential of this length of railway as a light rapid transit link to Widnes and a reopened Ditton transport interchange would need to be looked at, of course together with the portion of it east of Warrington, the aim being to optimise the whole route's potential for heavy or light rail.

