

Comments in response to the Warrington Local Plan Preferred Development Option Consultation

I offer the following comments in response to this consultation.

1. The PDO is based on a level of growth which is over and above the baseline economic jobs forecast (which in itself has increased considerably from the original SHMA published in Jan2016) and represents a 25% increase in the population of the town. This appears to be based primarily on the council's desire for city status (see eg para 4.6 of the consultation document) - I am not aware that the population of Warrington has been consulted on this ambition and I do not believe that the majority of the population would support it. I therefore believe that the PDO is based on an unnecessarily high housing target.
2. The consultation document makes bold statements that transition to a New City will enable the severe congestion which impacts on the town to be addressed (see eg paras 4.6 and 4.40). No detail is given to justify these statements, nor any explanation of why infrastructure cannot be improved now. It is hard to see how the 'garden city suburb' can lead to anything other than more congestion, unless there is a major programme of road building and road widening. This, in itself, would be a blight on the current character of south Warrington and hardly in keeping with the idea of a 'garden suburb'.
3. Paragraph 4.19 suggests exceptional circumstances can be demonstrated to justify the proposed scale of Green Belt release. What are these exceptional circumstances? Surely a desire to achieve city status is not an exceptional circumstance?
4. Objective W6 refers to ensuring development makes a positive contribution to improving Warrington's air quality. It is hard to see how development on the planned scale can possibly do this – the additional traffic associated with more than 24,000 new homes and increased employment areas, and the huge loss of green space can only lead to a worsening of air quality.
5. Objective W4 refers to 'encouraging active lifestyles'. Currently, many residents in South Warrington can readily access green space for walking, running and other activities, without the need to use their cars. The PDO will remove those green spaces leading to a less active lifestyle for many, and an increase in the need to travel for those who wish to maintain an active lifestyle.
6. In Table 7 and paragraph 4.55, high level spatial option 3 is discounted primarily on the basis of impact on the character of settlements. However, the PDO will impact massively on the character of areas such as Grappenhall village, Appleton Thorn, and Stretton, which, rather than being semi-rural, as now, will be engulfed in one huge urban area. The extra housing and associated traffic from both the garden suburb and the SW extension will also have a significant negative impact on the character of Stockton Heath.
7. Paragraphs 4.60 and 4.65 describe the preferred option (option 2) for main development locations as including a garden city suburb of approx. 6000 homes. This is misleading as the PDO actually includes a suburb of nearer 7300 homes when the 950 homes to be built on HCA-owned land are taken into account (Table 11).

8. There is no discussion in the document of how adequate medical services will be provided for the potential 50,000 or more extra residents. Has the council had any discussions with the NHS on this?
9. There is no discussion in the consultation document of the environmental impact of the loss of Green Belt, nor the impact of the loss of agricultural land.
10. Paragraph 5.32 says that development of the garden suburb **may** require a further higher level connection across the Ship canal. I consider that would be essential to avoid congestion chaos. Consideration also needs to be given to improved crossings of the Bridgwater canal.
11. The consultation itself was poorly communicated and held over the holiday period, though I appreciate the extension of the deadline to 29 September.

In summary, I believe the council needs to:

- reconsider the number of new homes required and its desire to achieve city status
- make every effort to ensure that all possible brownfield sites are identified and used before any encroachment onto Green Belt occurs
- consider a higher housing density in appropriate areas (eg apartments in the town centre and other urban areas)
- make considerably greater efforts at the next stage of consultation to ensure the population of all the affected areas are aware
- give more cognisance to the views of the people of Warrington rather than those of developers and landowners

Whatever the final outcome, it is absolutely essential that adequate supporting infrastructure is in place before any housing or industrial development takes place.

