

## Preferred Development Option of Local Plan by Warrington Borough Council.

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### Introduction.

What follows are my comments which relate to the proposals by Warrington Borough Council in their 'Preferred Development Option' document for the Local Plan which they have produced. The main points I have made concern Appleton and its surrounding area, [REDACTED] but as a resident of Warrington I think that some of them could be extended to encompass the whole of the town. [REDACTED] I have often heard comments referring to those 'living south of the Manchester Ship Canal' (MSC). Indeed since the publishing of the LDO and prior to that, during the campaign against building houses in Grappenhall Heys and Appleton earlier this year, I have been accused of being a NIMBY which I find both offensive and insulting. I do hope that serious consideration will be made to what follows in this statement.

### 1. Loss of land designated as Green Belt.

Its name alone says everything to me. I was always under the impression that land given this name was regarded as a protected zone to be left in perpetuity in its natural state and for the benefit of all. The Green Belt land in the south of Warrington is a beautiful area, possibly the best in Warrington, and is enjoyed by not just the people of the town but also visitors to the area. It is the lung filled with fresh air in what is a heavily polluted town and it separates the small historic villages which are dotted around the area, maintaining their identity. To engulf them with massive developments is in my opinion totally unacceptable. As I understand it Central Government has issued guidance to Councils saying that the feelings of existing residents should be taken into account when planning developments and that building on greenbelts should be an absolute last resort. The reaction by the people living in south Warrington to these proposals is evidence that the Council is imposing something on them which they do not want and are therefore ignoring this guidance. There also appears to be something of a contradiction in the Council's own explanation of what a Green Belt is. It says in the glossary terms it issued at the recent LDO presentations that there is a need for Green Belt to 'check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas' and also 'to prevent the merging of neighbouring towns'. So on one hand the Council doesn't want to build developments to the north of the town to avoid merging with Wigan but to the south it recommends building thousands of houses which as a consequence will create a sprawl. If that isn't hypocrisy I don't know what is?

### 2. City status.

I do not support the proposal for Warrington to become a city, mainly because I cannot see any benefit from it. As a town the population of Warrington has more than doubled over the past forty years developing beyond all recognition and this has been due to its unique geographical position with regards to motorways, the Manchester Ship Canal and railways; being called a city to my mind will not make a scrap of difference, I am unaware of any benefits Preston has gained since its 'upgrading' The North West has enough cities as it is and I think that to be regarded as a town has a ring to it that I like. In truth Warrington simply is not a city.

### 3. The size of the Garden City Suburb.

This will destroy the whole character of the area. It will create a sprawling mass of houses with the motorways creating a boundary which will give it attributes similar to a walled town. People living in houses close by to the motorways will be exposed to noise, vibration and pollution and the attraction to living in the area will be drastically diminished.

### 4. Stockton Heath.

The details regarding Stockton Heath being way beyond its capacity and the reasons for it have been common knowledge for a long time so there is little point in listing them here but any further development in the area could take it into a critical state. I welcome the proposal to build roads to the West and East of the area thus providing effectively by passes to the village. My thoughts on the transport proposals are given in the next paragraph.

### 5. Transport.

When it comes to building the infrastructure in keeping with (and ahead of) the massive development which has happened in the town over the last forty or so years the Council has been sadly lacking. It has failed to upgrade and/or build the necessary roads, bridges and tunnels to deal with the problems that were caused by the very things which attracted the success. I regularly travel to Europe and have observed towns much smaller and less busy than Warrington which have far superior infrastructures. It is obvious that a ring road around the town is essential and the proposed new roads to the west and east should be regarded as the start of one.

In my opinion the route of the new road running north and east from junction 10 of the M56 towards Appleton is completely wrong. To take it through a residential area is outrageous because of vibration, noise and fumes from the traffic (particularly from HGV which will use it to get to the industrial area at Appleton Thorn), there is also a risk to the safety of pedestrians, especially where footpaths cross roads, that on Dipping Brook Road being one example. Surely a better route would be parallel to the M56 through to the industrial area at Appleton Thorn and then turn north parallel to the M6 staying within the industrial area. Spokes from this road could then feed the residential areas. As a plan for the future this should be continued right around the town to form a ring road.

Another problem which comes to mind regarding the proposed new roads is the Howshoots Link from Grappenhall Heys. It will provide a route through to the M6 from the junction of Lyons Lane and London Road and consequentially a short cut for drivers to avoid paying tolls across the new Runcorn Bridge. The proposed new bridges across the Mersey and the Manchester Ship Canal around Chester Road in the west will be part of this route. The idea of HGV going through Grappenhall Heys is incredulous, I have been parked on this road outside the Grappenhall Walled Garden for an event along with other visitors and the result was that vehicles were only able to pass in one direction. To expect HGV to go along that road is beyond belief, particularly when one also considers that there are two primary schools and a high school close by it. The children at the high school also have to cross this road to get to the school's playing field. I have already spoken of the existing state of Stockton Heath and this additional traffic will add to the problem as will Peel Holdings plan to massively increase the number of container ships travelling along the MSC and the consequential increase in the opening of the swing bridges. All this could well take the village into the critical state it is currently so close to.

I have some concerns about the lack of a fast and easy access route into the town centre from the south so that people can visit it's shops and also get to the rail stations to travel to work. I am not

convinced that the single carriage roads which are planned will have the capacity to take the increase in traffic. Parking in the town centre is also inadequate and not always convenient.

Cycling routes around the proposed developments are a welcome consideration but they need to be linked to a network of cycle routes around the whole of the town, not abruptly ending as evident on the A49 between Lyons Lane and Stockton Heath.

#### 6. Environment.

The wild life in Appleton has an abundance of protected species. To build in the numbers which are being proposed will put them at serious risk and does not appear to have been given the consideration it deserves. Again on one of my regular trips to Maastricht in The Netherlands I pass under the Kikbeek Ecoduct on the A2 motorway. A substantial amount of money was spent on building this which was to avoid the motorway blocking the route used by wildlife in the area. That's how serious they take the environment.

#### 7. Density of buildings.

In their calculations the Council has set a figure of 30 dwellings/hectare throughout the developments. This could be adjusted by using a higher figure on the brown field sites near the town centre where there should be less of a call for people to want parking spaces for cars and individual gardens with their homes. I suggest apartments could be built, which would be affordable for the young and suitable for senior citizens, although not combined to avoid clashes between party going youngsters disturbing the elderly late at night. As a consequence the number of dwellings required in the outer areas should reduce.

#### 8. Health care.

The problems about access to health care is known nationally and Warrington is no different. Getting appointments at surgeries are a constant irritation and waiting times at the General Hospital are no different. An additional twenty four thousand houses will exacerbate the need for additional hospital capacity. Is Warrington General Hospital capable of being enlarged, would another hospital be needed in the south or would the answer be to build one larger new hospital? Also is the pipeline secure to supply doctors/nurses/ dentists to staff the surgeries which will serve the new residents.

#### 9. Equity of the plan.

Some may say that this point is a very emotional one, because as previously said, there have been accusations of NIMBYism. I don't think that equity has been given the consideration it deserves in the Plan.

One of the Councils aims should be to unify the population's attitude and remove the north – south division caused by the boundary changes of the 1960's. The animosity evident by the 'them and us' comments (the working class Lancastrians in the north and the middle class of Cheshire in the south) can still be heard and was even witnessed from some of the town's councillors by attendees at the Planning Committee meeting for the proposed developments at Grappenhall Heys and Appleton in June. Two councillors from north Warrington exposed the political divide in the town when they made the disgraceful comments that their areas had been subjected to developments and that it was the now 'souths' turn. What they failed to mention was the fact that in the north there was a vast expanse of land which became available when the Burtonwood airbase closed. This area was un-accessible to the residents of the town during its occupancy by the military forces and therefore

was totally incomparable to the rolling hills and untouched countryside in the south of the town on which people can still freely roam to enjoy.

I am aware of the need to avoid getting too close to Wigan to avoid boundaries being fused together and so avoiding Warrington becoming part of Greater Manchester. But that aside there are plenty of other areas around the town which can be used to develop the housing stock. This would share the need more equitably and remove the isolation and victimisation being felt by those in the south of the town.

#### 10. The effects on Brexit.

Central Government is spending a lot of time considering the future of immigrants from the EU who wish to remain here after Brexit, but what about the consequences caused by those who are going to leave because of it?

Where in the Council's Plan has Brexit been considered. How many houses will be vacated by immigrants moving out of the UK? Also what will be the effect of Brexit on our requirement for farming land? Will we need to become more self sufficient by growing more of our own produce and rearing more animals?

#### 11. Alternative area for development.

I have read that neighbouring councils can work together to reach the figures which have been set. Although not in Warrington but following the example of the Burtonwood air base, couldn't the redundant air base at Appleton Thorn be used for either housing or Industrial developments?

#### 12. Professional report on the LDP.

I have read a professional report which assesses the LDP. There are some serious failures in the LDP raised in it and it is suggested that the Council needs to review the decision they have made. I expect that this will be made available to the Council by those who commissioned the report, should they so wish.

#### Conclusion.

Central Government has stated that there is a need to build more houses and industrial areas and I understand that the Council has a duty to develop a plan to show how Warrington can play a part in providing those needs. What I am not convinced about is just how much and where that building should be. As I travel around I see lots of unused industrial units and I also see areas of great beauty which are endangered by these proposals. I see the need for massive infrastructure which has long been overdue whether any additional building takes place or not. I also read about the numbers required for the future, based on 'educated' calculations for a plan which will last for twenty years. However I am not convinced how accurate those figures are and think that they could be influenced by the Council's aspiration to become a city. What I also don't see is a plan that includes the controlled supply of those needs or the ability to vary the plans over this time because of the possibility of future adjustments to the forecasts or perhaps the introduction of new information. Nor do I see that if at any time the plan is changed the programme can be stopped in such a way that it will leave Warrington in a good state. In other words the job doesn't appear half done because for example the building of a housing estate was stopped before it has been completed and essential elements which were planned such as shops or doctors surgeries were never built. An example being Grappenhall Heys where people were under the impression that a local centre was going to be built and never was. A scenario I have in mind here is that if and when the Fiddlers Ferry

power station is de-commissioned how many dwellings could be built on that land and would that lead to a reduction in the need to build elsewhere?

So in summary I ask that consideration should be made to adjust the plan so that it shows the building of property spread fairly around the town. Roads which are so obviously needed now are built in less sensitive areas, whatever the final building plan looks like, but at the same time they should be capable of providing what may be required for the future. That those untouched areas, in particular the greenbelts which enhance the quality of life for the population of the whole town, are placed at the end of the programme so that if circumstances change they remain as they are thus they will then be preserved for the benefit of future generations. That the Council develops a strategy to rid the town of the 'north/south split' it suffers from.

However before anything moves to the next stage the review suggested by the report mentioned in paragraph 12 should take place.