

PREFERRED DEVELOPMENT OPTION CONSULTATION RESPONSE

I respond to the Council's Preferred Development Options as an elected representative of Thelwall ward. I have spoken to many residents in and beyond my ward regarding the Preferred Development Option.

The need for new homes and employment land is based on over optimistic projections. I believe strongly that exceptional circumstances to review Green Belt do not exist and that development can be accommodated within the urban area. Stated housing growth projections are developer led with no thought for affordable housing, housing for young families, single people and the elderly. Housing targets do not adequately justify the potential social and environmental costs in terms of traffic congestion, inadequate public services and loss of green belt. I would like to see the housing targets reduced to a level which balances ambition for the town with public opinion, and better reflects the most likely economic and demographic outlook rather than the Council's most preferred outlook. Whilst the green belt release is in one area (or two as the preferred locations suggest), the effect of this is highly unfair. Although the green belt assessment may point to south Warrington as being the weakest green belt, it is nevertheless some of the finest, most utilised and best appreciated green space in the borough and is recognised as such far beyond its immediate vicinity. I would ask for the preferred development locations to be seriously re-evaluated, with fairness to all residents and communities across the borough being a new consideration.

I recognise that green- and brownfield sites within the existing urban area have been maximised within the PDO. I also welcome attempts made in the document, not least shown in the development timelines, which show the Council's principle of developing these sites before any greenbelt sites. That said I would question what absolute guarantees can be given to ensure that land released from greenbelt will be protected until the existing urban area has been fully developed. This is particularly true of safeguarded land, which would be at greater risk if guarantees on this principle are not made and adhered to.

The strong feeling is that people do not want to live in a City Suburb. There is a strong feeling that this has been ill thought out with no consideration for people who live in the areas of Thelwall and Grappenhall and Latchford with no assessment of the impact on designated heritage assets, listed buildings and Grappenhall and Thelwall's Conservation Areas. A Garden city suburb will result in loss of environmental assets and there has been no study done to understand the implications for air quality and more congestion as most new properties would be dependent on private cars. The public health annual report talks about the importance of green and open space in relation to Health and Wellbeing and I feel strongly that this has not been considered and in fact the idea of using the Trans Pennine Trail as a transport route has not properly considered the importance of it as an amenity that is used for walking, cycling and riding. The impact of any form

on transport route on the people who live in close proximity has not been considered and I feel the process has been carried out in a very insensitive way with little or no regard for residents.

The loss of green space will have irreversible impacts on wildlife habitats, hydrology and public amenity. Much of the green belt earmarked for release is ecologically important. Flooding is a growing concern, as evidenced by the Ship Canal flooding of last year. People consider the woodland and fields of south Warrington to be the 'lungs of the borough'. Urban sprawl of the nature suggested in the PDO will be incredibly damaging both environmentally and socially. The character of the villages in south Warrington will be changed beyond recognition.

Mention of public services provision is welcomed. In terms of healthcare, there are national concerns around resourcing and staffing GP surgeries with Warrington having a shortage of working G.P'S. Health provision will not be able to cope with development on the scale planned in the PDO.

I believe the Plan period should be reduced for instance over ten or fifteen years, with fewer houses could mean that little or no green belt need be released. Given the current uncertainties such as Brexit, the future of the Manchester Ship Canal and the closure of Fiddlers Ferry, the assumptions used in the plan for economic and demographic change could quickly be undone. It seems illogical to plan ahead for a longer than necessary period. It would be a better approach to plan for a shorter period with greater clarity.

If this is a genuine consultation on what are only preferred options, then I implore the Council to carefully consider the scale of public concern over the proposals. The level of development and concentration of that development in certain parts of the town is wholly unreasonable, unjustified and most importantly unfair.

Finally, one of the key sources of angst during this consultation on the PDO has been due to the woeful lack of communication from the Borough Council. It is only thanks to the selfless effort of residents groups, helped in some part by local councillors and Parish Councils, that many thousands of people know anything about the PDO consultation. This improved awareness was reflected by the huge turnouts and long queues to later consultation events. To communicate so poorly is a dereliction of responsibility by the Borough Council. Whilst I appreciate resources are sparse, for something as important as the Local Plan, there must have been means available to contact households directly, especially in the most affected areas in the south of Warrington. I would like the Council to give assurances that communication can and will be better. So therefore I oppose the preferred development option on the grounds as stated above and the unbalanced targeting of Grappenhall, Thelwall, Latchford and the South of the Town, the decimation it would cause with unacceptable damage to the environment open

space and amenities and the splitting of the villages. There is absolutely nothing in the preferred development option that is positive for the villages.

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