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29th September 2017

Dear Sir,

Objection to the PDO presented by WBC

I am a local resident who will be significantly impacted by the proposed development. My main objections fall into four main categories:

- Lack of confidence in the base assumptions of demand,
- Incomplete or poor strategy,
- Disproportionate local impact.
- The approach to this consultation

I will cover each in more detail.

Lack of confidence in the base assumptions.

The PDO has been built on a projected forecast demand for houses in the Warrington area. This value has been calculated based on old Experian models with pre-Brexit assumptions and with a significant addition of “desired” additional growth. This includes quoting numbers from an unconfirmed Devolution Bid – a wish rather than any certainty. If the base of demand from newer government-approved models were used, then the forecast number would be reduced. This has now happened, but it seems the council has arbitrarily increased its demand again by adding on unsubstantiated forecast numbers – it is a forecast built on desire not facts.

There is no phasing to the demand and no correlation between the development of business and transport links to the actual forecast demand.

The economic plan is also pre-Brexit and while it says that it takes even a recession into account, I can find no evidence of anything other than a very optimistic approach to economic planning. There are hundreds of thousands of square feet of industrial space currently available in the area – there is no model provided to justify or accurately estimate future demand.

Acquisition of the required capital or debt needed to fund the future development will need further analysis of a much higher quality than that provided in the PDO and supporting documents. Banks would not lend money based on these figures. Adopting the PDO without the better analysis is a bad business decision and an insult to residents. Further work to establish a proper forecast for the entire borough is required – or the council will continue to say they are happy with the forecast and make poor decisions based on it. Moody’s recent downgrade of WBC’s debt status is a good example of questioning the financial judgement of the council’s decisions.

Incomplete or poor strategy

The proposed development is confined to a single large area in the south-east of the borough. The borough is divided by two canals and a river, and bounded by three motorways. Residents are well-

aware of the significant bottlenecks that occur at normal times of day, never mind when there are hold-ups on the motorways or simply at busy times.

This sounds like a grumpy resident, but I am actually making a strategic point: why would you invest a disproportionate amount of development in an area that has car-focussed transport links to the central business area and the transport hubs that link us to other areas? These links are poor enough already – why make it worse? We would be building a walled community, bounded by voluntary walls created by a desire to not go outside the area because of the poor transport capacity. The newly-developing town centre would not grow at the rates we want it to if we cannot get people into it.

21st century cities are public transport-focussed; Manchester is shutting roads not building them. The plan makes no provision for an expansion of a tram or rail-based transport system. It is not a plan that supports a city vision.

The plan also makes no reference to a crossing of the key waterways – which I would have expected to see referenced in 5.32. The plan cannot work without this crossing. I suspect an appropriately-sized crossing would add significantly to the cost of the development.

In the PDO there is no reference to any sort of business case or financial model to support the previous options which were rejected. This would never be accepted in a business context – how can anyone narrow down options without knowing the price and benefits? And how can one know the price without doing traffic and infrastructure planning – something we have been told repeatedly has not been done.

Disproportionate local impact.

The proposed release of green belt in a single area in the borough is a poor choice based on a very questionable report from construction company Arup. The 32 parcels of land identified do not add up to a “weak” assessment – even if you believe the arbitrary judgement on each of the parcels.

I believe that all communications between Arup and WBC in relation to this study should be published reviewed to ensure that they are fair. I also believe Arup should be asked to exempt themselves from any future interest in the development.

The proposed development of major roadways adjacent to local communities is a major impact and one that is particularly unfair to current residents. This is a great example of the council not considering local residents.

It is also clear that this level of investment in one area of the borough will lead to reduced investment in the rest of the council’s areas of responsibilities. A new hospital in this new suburb will not be popular with residents in the north, new businesses (if they come) bringing jobs to only one area will not be welcomed by other areas. The investment and benefits, along with the impact, should be more fairly spread.

The approach to the consultation

In reading the documents I am surprised at the number of times that phrases of the type “and having looked at the feedback we decided we did not need to change our original calculations/opinion/position” appears. It is clear the council is not listening. When talking to Andy Farrell, he punctuates my comments with the phrase “in your opinion” – this is not a council that is open to listening.

The PDO was presented without any prior consultation on other options and it is clear that this is “route 1” for the planning department.

Carrying out the consultation over the summer period and only extending it by a short period is a reflection of the council trying to manage the process rather than genuinely listen to its constituents.

If you compare the frequency of some words; “residents” appears six times, “community” appears seven, and “gypsies” appears thirteen.

In summary, I believe that we need to understand the real housing supply needed to address any housing crisis in our area, to build a cross-Warrington inclusive plan that brings benefit and impact to a breadth of areas, but most importantly we need to develop a plan that a 21st century aspiring city deserves.

Yours faithfully,

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