

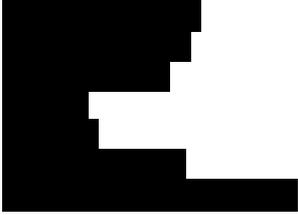


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The Planning Policy and Programmes Team  
Warrington Borough Council  
New Town House  
Buttermarket Street  
Warrington  
WA1 2NH

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: South Warrington Urban Extension Framework Plan Document 2017 as part of the Local Plan preferred development Option Regulation 18 Consultation



27th September 2017

I am writing to you as a resident in Warrington.

I wish to make you aware of a number of strong objections that I have with regard to the proposed potential development of the South Warrington Urban Extension area. As a household in the middle of this area and an immediate neighbour to two of the major parts of the plan, I am of the view that the proposed development would have a serious impact on our standard of living. My specific objections are as follows:

#### **1. Detrimental impact upon residential amenities**

Proposals for the development should be of good design and respect the character of the surroundings. They should have regard for both the appearance and treatment of spaces between and around buildings and the amenities of neighbouring residents.

Residential development should not be permitted in areas where it would demonstrably harm the character or appearance of an area or the amenities enjoyed by the local residents.

The aim should be for any development to result in a benefit in environmental and landscape terms. I believe that the proposed development would significantly alter the fabric of the area and amount to serious "cramming" in what is a low density rural lane in the countryside and would lead to a loss of valuable green space. One of the aims that the council's local plan should always endeavour to do is to protect or enhance the local environment including wildlife habitats, trees, hedgerows and woodland. The greenbelt, which includes the ditch that runs along the boundary of our garden, the hedgerows in front and surrounding the fields both in front and behind our property, are wildlife havens for many birds including sparrow hawks, blue tits, robins, jays, blackbirds, sparrows, ducks, greater crested blue tits, house martins, magpies, blackbirds, pheasants and animals such as rabbits, hares, field mice, moles, frogs and bats. There are lots of bees (and there are a number of local bee keepers who help with the thriving bee community) and wasps (these I have recently learnt are one of nature's natural pesticides). I am sure there are a great many other creatures I have omitted to mention. The wildlife and the constantly changing view of the well used and productive agricultural land in front and behind our house adds significantly to the amenity of the area.

Green open space, with the hedgerows, woodlands and ditches provide a valuable contribution to both the road scene and the overall area and are an amenity both for us as local residents and those in the other areas of Thelwall, along with the residents of the neighbouring villages of Lymm, Grappenhall and Latchford. The public footpath directly opposite the front of our house is used by a large number of people on a daily basis, in activities such as walking (including nordic walking), running, walking the dogs, horseriding and cycling. It gives direct and easy access to both the Bridgewater canal and the Transpennine way (which is also affected by the proposed route of the strategic road). All of these activities add to the overall health and happiness of society and are therefore of crucial importance when considering the amenity of the area. It is currently available to all, no matter what your household income. We do not require methods of transport

to access it and it is thereby helping to strengthen the cohesiveness of the neighbourhood. The removal of these and other public footpaths in the local vicinity would therefore lead to a loss of community leisure space and would have a detrimental effect on the Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2015 which sets out the overarching aims of “Working together for stronger neighbourhoods, healthier people, a vibrant and resilient economy and greater equality across all our communities”.

The National Ecosystem Assessment (UK NEA) shows that the tendency to focus only on the market value of the resources we can use and sell, such as crops, timber and fisheries, has led to a decline of some ecosystems and habitats through pollution, over-exploitation and land conversion. The UK NEA showed:

- Pollinators are worth £430 million per year to British agriculture
- The amenity benefits of living close to rivers, coasts and other wetlands is worth up to £1.3 billion per year to the UK
- The health benefits of living with a view of green space are worth up to £300 per person per year.

## **2) Concerns over Pollution**

In May 2016, The World Health Organisation reported that Warrington is the second worst town/city in the North West for breaching safe levels of air pollution (second behind Salford). It states that outdoor air pollution (Ambient) is a major environmental health problem. In 2012 studies showed that outdoor air pollution was estimated to cause 3 million premature deaths worldwide per year. The lower the levels of air pollution, the better the cardiovascular and respiratory health of the population will be, both long and short-term. One of the examples it gives for successful policies, that reduce air pollution, is with urban planning: improving the energy efficiency of buildings and making cities more compact, and thus energy efficient. I therefore feel higher density in the town centre, lower density in outer areas should be explored more thoroughly. WBC (Warrington Borough Council) have used a housing density of 30 dwellings per hectare in the PDO (Preferred Development Option), by achieving a higher density in the town centre (eg apartments) of up to 40 dwellings per hectare would enable a lower density to be achieved elsewhere in the PDO. This has the advantage of providing more properties suitable for first time buyers who often do not want gardens and enjoy the environment of a vibrant town centre both for social reasons and work; and they would be near to public transport hubs thereby avoiding the need for cars. This would lead to WBC requiring less green belt land.

This is also supported in the WHO examples that reduce air pollution: for transport: shifting to clean modes of power generation (The decommissioning of The Fiddlers Ferry power station); prioritizing rapid urban transit, walking and cycling networks in cities as well as rail interurban freight and passenger travel. The 2011 Census indicated higher levels of car ownership in Warrington. If a further 24,000 households are created in Warrington without substantial investment in sustainable transport options, the traffic situation will deteriorate further, this in turn would lead to worse pollution levels.

It is therefore quite unacceptable, in my opinion, that a plan of this magnitude has been put together and presented to the public before the Joint needs Strategic Assessment on air quality and transport Warrington has been completed. They are (according to Richard Moore (Environmental Protection Officer (Air)) ) still in development. The subjects of air and transport have been split due to there being wider health issues for each subject. They are aiming to have the chapters published by April next year.

Weaste Lane is already surrounded by major roads- The M6, the Knutsford Road and the A56 Stockport road. In the Executive Summary it states that monitoring at busy roadside locations on roads linking to the town centre continue to show exceedences in the annual mean nitrogen dioxide objective outside of the current Quality Management Areas. By placing a strategic road through the middle of our community it will not only isolate members of our community from each other, thereby weakening our neighbourhood, but also has the potential for causing more pollution within our area through an increase in traffic flow, this in turn could lead to poorer health.

## **3) Concerns over Health**

The health cost of air pollution in the UK is thought to be about £16 Billion every year. The building of the numbers of houses and roads, as described by the PDO, is likely to bring thousands of extra cars into the town every day. Professor P. Cosford (Medical Director for Public Health England - a national organisation that advises the government and local authorities how to improve everyone's health) said in March 2017, 'Air Pollution can damage lives with Harmful effects on human health, the economy and the environment. It increases the chances of hospital admissions, visits to emergency departments and respiratory and cardiovascular symptoms which interfere with everyday life, especially for people who are already vulnerable. Bad air quality affects everyone and it has a disproportionate impact on the young and old, the sick and the poor.'

Warrington and Halton hospitals are already operating at or near capacity. Almost all the GP/medical centres in Warrington are operating at or near to capacity. The PDO does mention providing new health facilities in the supposed Garden City Suburb and the South West extension, however to my knowledge there was notably no mention of increasing capacity at Warrington Hospital. Not only would the residents occupying the additional 24,000 dwellings require access to healthcare facilities but the likely increase in air pollution from just the increase in cars alone is likely to put even more pressure on the already stretched Warrington hospital due to the impact that poor air pollution and increased traffic have on health.

#### **4) Concerns over drainage**

The proposed Strategic road / conceptual public transport connectivities that appear to run straight through the field behind us, right next to our boundary and into the field in front raises concerns over drainage. This would be further compounded by that of the proposed residential development within proposed safeguarded land (currently green field land) behind us. Such large areas of hardstanding would significantly increase the run off into our area.

This land gently inclines (with us on the lower aspect of the inclination). The current ditch at the bottom of the field that borders our property is always flowing with water to the best of my knowledge. The farmer recently (I think last year ) did a lot of work to the middle of the field as there was an area that was usually not as good for growing due to the collection of water in that area. During periods of rainfall ,the area on Weaste Lane to the left of us, forms a huge puddle that often in winter can take over the majority of that portion of the road, at the same time a portion of the field in front of this area nearest to the road is often flooded.

#### **5) Loss of privacy and overlooking.**

The proposed strategic road and residential development is such that the primary amenity of our back garden and to a certain extent the front would be seriously overlooked by the proposed new developments as would our house. This would result in a serious invasion of our privacy. I also feel that a number of properties on our road are locally listed and the above plans would really affect the historic nature of the area.

To date I have seen no mention of plans to help screen the road or residential developments from our property or decrease the results of noise and disturbance from both the proposed road and residential dwellings and as such I would urge you to consider the responsibilities of the council under the Human Rights Act in particular Protocol 1, Article 1 which states that a person has the right to peaceful enjoyment of all their possessions which includes the home and other land. I believe that the proposed development would have a dominating impact on us and our right to the quiet enjoyment of our property. Article 8 of the Human Rights Act states that a person has the substantive right to respect for their private and family life.

In the case of Britton vs SOS the courts reappraised the purpose of the law and concluded that the protection of the countryside falls within the interests of Article 8. Private and family life therefore encompasses not only the home but also the surroundings.

#### **6) Concerns over vibration and noise**

Our locally listed property was originally built in the 1750's and as such does not have the level of foundations found in more modern properties. As a result of this I am concerned that the proposed new strategic road, (which I am led to understand, is being built to help the overflow of traffic from the nearby M6, and therefore would in its nature have a large number of lorries and heavy goods vehicles) would lead to increased disturbance from vibration and noise to our property. Traffic vibrations can also be caused by heavy vehicles such as buses.

#### **7) The inadequacy of the consultation process**

In a supreme court case against Haringley Borough Council in 2014 a benchmark was set for the standards of local authority consultation. In the case it was made clear that while there is no general legal duty to consult people affected by a decision, a duty to consult may arise out of the Council's common law duty of fairness (R(BAPIO Action Limited) v Secretary of State for the Home department (2007) EWCA Civ 1139.

The key message from the case was that consultations must be carried out fairly. Looking at issues of who, when, how and evidence based analysis.

1. who should they consult- the demands of fairness are higher where the authority contemplates depriving someone of something
2. How should they consult- if someone is likely to be worse off they should be specifically identified and consulted
3. When to consult- it should be done with sufficient time to allow people to know what you are thinking of doing, telling them the options and giving time for them to reflect on it:
  - a) Consultation should be at a time when the proposals are still at a formative stage to allow for "intelligent consideration and response"
  - b) Adequate time must be given
  - c) It must allow the public meaningful participation in the process
4. Analysis- The data collected from the consultation must be handled and objectively managed- there must be sound data collection, processing and analysis

Warrington Borough Council have failed in a number of respects. The highest court in the land requires that if a person is to be worse off as a result of the proposals they should be contacted directly by hand, delivered letters and by telephone if necessary. This should have been reinforced by street notices and press releases. None of which have been done by the council. The courts have determined that the use of the council's website alone is not sufficient. People affected should have been identified and targeted with communications. This most certainly did not happen on Weaste Lane, and most of us will consider ourselves worse off as a result of these proposals with a number at risk of losing their properties. I was only fortunate to have heard when I returned from holiday because a friend who lives in Appleton noticed at one of your

public consultation meetings that the plans were affecting my area. There were no letters sent to households no notices along the roads and the consultation was timed to be in the summer holidays which meant that certainly for us by the time we realised the process was happening there was very little time to study and understand what was being put forward. As you are aware the plan was likely to have a huge impact on all of our lives especially the south of Warrington and yet the attempt to inform residents affected was unacceptably poor. Communication has therefore been ineffective and compromised the consultation process.

I have been unaware of any evidence of a scoping exercise around the consultation or that of a steering group. The greater the involvement with the community the better. No links have been forged with local groups, community representatives, bodies and forums to ensure understanding the proposals and also the process.

There is no evidence of a communications strategy. The communication has been very inadequate. The information is poor and the plans are illegible. The public meeting in Lymm was so full we had to wait outside for long periods before getting in and even then it was very hard to get to speak to the planning officers and then the answers given were often conflicting depending to whom you spoke and vague. In addition, the data and documents provided in the consultation were not digestible during the period allowed for the consultation.

There has been no proper access given to the consultation documentation. The information has been only been placed on line and at libraries as far as I am aware.

We were told that we could pick up paper copies of the reply forms at local libraries. When I went to ask in Lymm the Staff member there apologised she said she had had lots of us asking but they did not have copies and when she had rung to speak to the planning department (she had to wait 45 minutes to get through) she was told we could not get them from Lymm but needed to go into Warrington. I was given the address of the Contact Warrington, 26-30 Horsemarket Street. When I arrived the ladies on reception had not heard of the garden city plans and had to ring the planning department. I was then sent to another venue to pick up copies of this form which I was then able to hand out to a few of the members in our area who do not have access to the internet or are not comfortable using it. The council have relied too heavily on online forms and information. The council should not assume that people have access to technology.

There has been no proper data collection at the consultation meetings. A note of the number and name and address of the attendees was not taken. Feedback forms were not provided to the attendees to allow the council or any other relevant body to determine the usefulness and appropriateness of these meetings. Attendees at the meeting did not see the council's planners taking any notes of the comments being made to them.

The timetable for the consultation does not seem to even include the requirement for a report to be produced summarising the results of the consultation that is currently being carried out.

My points above are further evidence that you have failed to undertake a robust consultation process including a proper consultation and communications plan. This should have been drafted, tested and then implemented. People have not been enabled to take part in this extensive plan consultation. The council must give active consideration of the data collected.

Even in times of local government austerity this is not just best practice it is a requirement.

#### **8) Another main objection I wish to make is the WBC 's failure to show exceptional circumstances for reclassifying the green belt.**

The national Planning Policy framework (NPPF) section 9, clauses 79-82 relating to the protection of the green belt, and under specific clause 83, states that green belt boundaries should not be altered unless by 'exceptional circumstances' In addition, the governments current White paper entitled 'How to fix our broken housing market' also strongly supports the avoidance of using green belt land as, in part, defined by clause 1.39 on page 28 which states:

Therefore we propose to amend national policy to make clear that authorities should amend Green Belt boundaries only when they can demonstrate that they have examined fully all other reasonable options for meeting their identified development requirements, including:

- making effective use of suitable brownfield sites and the opportunities offered by estate regeneration,
- the potential offered by land which is currently underused, including surplus public sector land where appropriate,
- optimising the proposed density of development, and
- exploring whether other authorities can help meet some of the identified development requirement.

The basis for this objection is that I believe that despite substantial consultancy by WBC, in choosing the second of the 3 main options proposed, WBC have not fully demonstrated the requirements of the NPPF or the Governments definitions above in order to be able to claim exceptional circumstance.

Option 2, and indeed option 1, is understood to be firmly driven by the aspiration of warrington to become a city. The council tried in 1999 to make warrington 'the city of Peace' and then recently they did a bid to become the City of Culture for 2021- however they were not successful as the successful bidder had to prove its bid was centred around heritage. This last example makes a mockery of the latest plan which apart from planning to run a strategic road through a rural lane (that has a number of locally listed buildings on it), it also plans to promote urban sprawl by joining together the parishes of Hatton, Stretton, Appleton, Thelwall, Grappenhall and Lymm, such that they would loose parish identity. This is entirely contrary to the ethos of green belts and should therefore not be used as a basis for exceptional circumstance.

The economic and housing growth forecasts for the planned period proffered by consultants hinge around this aspiration for city status, to the detriment of green belt usage. This vision of city status appears to be firmly driving unrealistically

high economic and population growth over the next 20 years. In turn, these unrealistic projections for disproportionate population growth would appear to be driving this need for additional housing, which WBC maintain can only be provided by the uptake of green belt land. The continued aspiration (as shown above) of the Council executive to create a 'new city' does not warrant or justify the need for WBC to claim "exceptional Circumstance" in the use of green belt land, it is not the independent, objective and expertly assessed 'need' of the town.

If WBC were to lower their sights a little then, I believe, other options, including Option 3 and location sub option 5 could be a workable solution and possibly provide all the necessary inner Warrington developments and improvements. This would furthermore allow housing requirements to be downsized accordingly with a revised forecast for population and economic growth, thereby negating the need to uptake greenbelt.

In terms of Brown field and other site usage:

It is stated that other potential development urban sites in the north and east of Warrington are included in the call for sites exercise but have not been considered for inclusion in the preferred option. If other urban land is available for housing development, but has not been included in the land bank calculation, how can exceptional justification be claimed for the use of green belt in south Warrington.

In the Government's White paper for Fixing our broken housing market, chapter 1 section 1.29 states Policies in plans should allow a good mix of sites to come forward for development, so that there is choice for consumers, places can grow in ways that are sustainable, and there are opportunities for a diverse construction sector. Small sites create particular opportunities for custom builders and smaller developers. In section 1.30 It states In reflecting proposals set out in the Government's previous consultation on changes to the NPPF, we will indicate that great weight should be given to using small undeveloped sites within settlements for homes, where they are suitable for residential development.

Also in the Government's White paper for Fixing our broken housing market, Chapter 1 section 1.24 Bringing brownfield land back into use: we must make as much use as possible of the previously developed ('brownfield') land for homes- so that this resource is put to productive use, to support the regeneration of our cities, towns and villages, to support economic growth and to limit the pressure on the countryside.

I understand that the government is committed to phasing out coal fired power stations by 2025. I also understand that the operators of the Fiddlers Ferry power station, SSE, issued papers that indicate that it is highly likely, due to increasing and unsustainable financial losses, that the station will only continue to operate up to 2020. This is only just over 2 years away. With this in mind it seems obvious that the uncertainty expressed within the preferred option clause 3.6 is flawed and that at the latest, post 2025 the site would become available for development, the earliest possible date being 2020. I believe that WBC at this stage of planning should factor in their plans for the potential gain in the land bank now, such that the uptake of green belt land is negated or severely reduced.

It is clear that from the 5 further sub options of the Stage 4 location option evaluation, option 2 has been chosen resulting in the locating of the Garden City suburb. The fact that Option 5 (this does not require the wholesale uptake of greenbelt land) has been dismissed cannot be viewed as justification to claim exceptional circumstance. This decision making is considered contrary to NPPF and White paper guidelines and cannot be viewed as justification.

## **9) Miscalculation of the housing needs**

I found the figures the PDO document to be very technical and the document references certain key numbers as given "fact" without direct links to the source material or considering alternative calculations.

The Objectively Assessed Needs (OAN) is cited on pg.5 of the PDO as 839 new homes per annum (pa)- but this was based on 2012 surveys. I understand that before publishing the PDO, WBC were in possession of an updated May 2017 report based on 2014 data which shows a comparable figure of just 738 homes per year (but could be as low as 679 homes pa), but this number appears to have been ignored.

As the 839 is taken as the base for the higher Economic Development Needs Assessment (EDNA), then if, as the above suggests, the 839 is a significant overstatement, so must be the EDNA.

The lower number (738) is more consistent with the 716 homes pa average until 2039 within the latest ONS live tables which could be used to underpin the Government's proposed formula for calculating OAN published in 2017.

I believe that the PDO should have been prepared on the basis of the May 2017 addendum (or at the very least stated at the outset that it was based on out-of-date estimates that had subsequently been shown to be significant overstatements).

From what I can see there is no recognition of alternative assumptions and so the broad range of potential outcomes, particularly those with much lower housing requirements.

Although the legal challenge to the previously adopted local Development Plan was premised on the plan not properly reflecting the OAN and affordable housing requirement this PDO is stated to be "option 2", which appears to be based on the aspiration of the executives of the council to create a "new city". It is not the independent, objective and expertly assessed 'need' of the town.

The statistics used by the officers have, it is contended, been based on a set of assumptions that have deliberately skewed the housing need in the area and been used to justify a higher housing requirement significantly above the OAN. Further, the officers have overlooked the fact that the data is inherently highly sensitive to the interrelationship between employment, population demographics and dwelling occupancy. It is submitted that the housing requirement should be based on a calculation of OAN that is consistent with the methodology and data underpinning the Government's September 2017 proposals for a nationally consistent approach. In my opinion the higher requirement for housing set out in the PDO does not appear logical, consistent or robust.

It is also contended that Option 2 is based on an overly optimistic employment and economic growth outlook. It has been predicated on very high level assumptions and considerations which are completely out of the control or influence of

WBC. It ignores the competing aspirations of adjacent and further afield boroughs and housing areas. Option 2 is also based on outdated data periods. Most importantly it pre dates the Brexit referendum; the outcome of which could potentially cause seismic changes to the local economy. The Plan should be based on an updated Strategic Housing Market Assessment that takes account of the latest economic, demographic and migratory expectations.

Even if long-term ONS statistics exist there is no Government requirement to produce a 25 year plan. It would be far more effective if WBC were to produce a ten year plan, by which point we will be much clearer of the economic and migratory impacts of Brexit, the impact from any completed national infrastructure initiatives and what the consequences of technological change have been on work and home life (and balance). It would also allow for the decommissioning of the Fiddlers Ferry and so the availability of an enormous brownfield site requiring regeneration.

It is ultimately contended that the PDO is fundamentally flawed as it is based on high level assumptions, outdated data and simplistic future predictions that ignore the complex inter-relation between employment, population demographics and dwelling occupancy and fails to take account of the latest economic, demographic and migratory expectations in a post-Brexit economy.

#### **1. 10)Disclosure and Transparency**

I would like you to also note that I believe that it is important that councillors and officers and all others involved closely with the decision making and planning of the preferred development option should disclose any positions and relationships, both formal and informal, which they have with any person or organisation likely to benefit in any way from the proposals in the warrington preferred development plan option. The residents of the borough deserve a higher standard of disclosure and transparency than has been shown to date.

I also believe we should be fully informed as to the precise and transparent procedures of public consultation, WBC policies and government guidance on the issues. We should also be fully informed on who will be independantly assessing and with what methods, the consultations, comments and contributions in order to enhance the quality of life and the environment of the residents of Warrington.

Yours faithfully,

