



---

Dear Sir/Madam

Having spoken directly to a number of council officials and attended several consultation events, both for the preferred development option and the closely associated Western link road proposals I am deeply concerned that Warrington borough council has no stated intention of carrying out a Rights of way improvement plan, (ROWIP) , for the town as part of its proposed overall development.

The council proposes to develop large areas of both green field, I find the term greenbelt to be misleading and brownfield for both housing and industry. These areas are currently used via a network of rights of way and permissive footpaths by many residents and visitors to the town for recreational purposes. Recreation which is enhanced by the wide variety of wildlife that thrives in these semi secluded habitats. Both green and brownfield areas also provide essential corridors enabling wildlife, particularly birds to exploit limited resources in harsh climate conditions. Nature reserves are an important part of preserving biodiversity but if too segregated by developments become ineffective, often with a restricted or limited number of species, leaving suitable habitats under utilised. Funding for these reserves, particularly from charitable donations is heavily dependent upon suitable public access to these sites. Without a sustainable and effective network of public paths, travel to isolated natural areas is restricted to motor vehicles, adding congestion, air pollution and undesirable noise to the very areas attracting visitors to is intended to protect.

Comments have been made by various council officers at consultation events that the effect of new road developments on their surrounding areas would be relatively limited and would in fact 'enhance' facilities for walkers and cyclists. It is difficult to imagine how walking or cycling along the side of a busy new main road between swathes of new housing estates and business or industrial parks could enhance the experience of visiting what was previously tranquil open countryside.

To ensure the preservation of wildlife corridors, often formed by footpaths themselves, access to the proportionally reduced open countryside and to enable new or modified public footpaths to permit access to wide range of outdoor leisure and recreational pursuits, an important part of the physical and mental wellbeing of residents, a comprehensive review and development programme for such amenities is essential.

Several sources suggest a ROWIP could be included in a general transport plan as has been done in the past. This policy has resulted in a substantial degradation of Warringtons public path network. By being classified a subordinate parts of larger schemes, public paths have been neglected, repairs underfunded and perhaps most importantly of all, many town centre draft rights of way have not even formally recorded on the definitive rights of way map, risking their loss under central government legislation which will extinguish paths unrecorded on DROW maps by the year 2026. Many of these paths are in the proposed waterfront and town centre proposed development areas.

It should be conceded that rights of way improvement plans are initially expensive, although innovative ways can be found to reduce these costs such as extensive use of volunteers and working closely with parish councils. Works identified by such assessments also produce long term funding needs but not assessing and developing a sustainable and

effective rights of way network would be even more expensive in loss of wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities and resident wellbeing, not to mention the economic effects on the town by making it a less desirable place to live, work or move to.

Regards

[Redacted]

[Redacted]