

# **Warrington Local Plan Review**

## **Pre-submission**

### **Sustainability Appraisal: SA Report**

**March 2019**



- Scenario B would provide the most appropriate balance between the benefits associated with housing / employment growth and the potential negative effects on environmental factors.
- Of the distribution options under Scenario B, incremental growth would be the most balanced approach. An approach focused entirely on the main urban area of Warrington would not provide a flexible approach to housing and could exclude the outer settlements from any benefits associated with growth. Conversely, an approach that dispersed development away from the urban areas would not be as likely to achieve the Plan objectives relating to regeneration, accessibility and economic growth.

4.2.14 At this stage, the Council identified Alternative B2 as the preferred approach, which was supported by the SA findings within the interim SA Report.

PDO options for the distribution of housing within the main urban area

4.2.15 Having established the preferred broad spatial option (*growth at the urban fringes, with incremental growth in the outer settlements*), the next stage was to identify and assess reasonable options for the location of development (*i.e. how growth at the edge of the urban area could be distributed*).

4.2.16 At this stage, the alternatives were based upon the evidence available at this point in time. From the call for sites exercise, it was established that incremental growth adjacent to the outlying settlements would be capable of accommodating a minimum of 1,000 dwellings. This left the remainder of approximately 8,000 dwellings to be accommodated adjacent to the main urban area in order to meet the overall housing requirement under the preferred growth strategy.

4.2.17 The Council utilised settlement area profiles to establish approaches to the distribution of development (around the urban area) that could accommodate approximately 8000 dwellings. As a result of this process five reasonable options were identified that were tested in the SA.

**Option 1** - A Garden City Suburb to the south east of the Warrington main urban area of approximately 8,000 homes.

**Option 2** - A Garden City Suburb of approximately 6,000 homes & an urban extension to the south west of Warrington of up to 2,000 homes.

**Option 3** - A Garden City Suburb of approximately 6,000 homes & an urban extension to the west of Warrington of up to 2,500 homes.

**Option 4** - A Garden City Suburb of approximately 4,000 homes & an urban extension to the south west of Warrington of up to 2,000 homes & urban extension to west of Warrington of up to 2,500 homes.

**Option 5** - A dispersed pattern of Green Belt release immediately adjacent to the main urban area

4.2.18 An appraisal of each alternative was undertaken and the findings were presented in an Interim SA Report, which was consulted upon alongside the Local Plan Preferred Development Option. These are reproduced for context at Appendix D.

4.2.19 At this stage, the Council identified Alternative B2 as the preferred approach, which was supported broadly by the SA findings within the interim SA Report.

### 4.3 Re-consideration of the spatial strategy (in light of reasonable alternatives)

4.3.1 Following consultation on the Preferred Development Option (which was accompanied by an Interim SA Report), the Council has undertaken a fundamental review of the technical evidence underpinning the Plan. This includes the following:

- There have been changes to the methodology for calculating housing needs (i.e. the Government Standard Methodology).
- Updated job forecasts which post-date the EU Referendum are showing a reduced rate of job growth compared to the forecasts which informed the Preferred Development Option.
- The application of a 10% flexibility factor has been identified as a suitable benchmark to ensure the delivery of the housing target.
- The Council has reviewed the capacity within the existing urban area, using higher density assumptions for the town centre and surrounding area whilst acknowledging that some sites identified in its town centre masterplanning work may not come forward in the Plan Period.
- A substantial number of representations made upon the Preferred Development Option stated that an extension to the north had been ruled out prematurely. Likewise, there was a body of respondents that suggested a more dispersed approach ought to be tested.
- The Council has revised the estimate of new homes that can be built within the Plan period in the Garden Suburb.

4.3.2 In response to these changes it was deemed necessary to establish revised options for the growth and distribution of housing.

4.3.3 With regards to housing growth, three scenarios have been identified. These are described below with the targets summarised in **Table 4.3** (further detail can be found in the **Development Options and Site Assessment Technical Report**). To provide a comparison with the original growth options, these are labelled as Scenarios D, E and F in this SA Report.

*Scenario D: Standard Methodology (2016 base):* This is the minimum requirement using the standard methodology but using the 2016 based household projections rather than the 2014 based projections.

Although this scenario runs contrary to Government guidance, it does enable an assessment of a lower level of growth and help in consideration of whether the exceptional circumstances exist for Green Belt release.

*Scenario E: Standard Methodology (2014 base):* This is the minimum level of housing that the Council needs to Plan for in accordance with the Government's new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2019) and Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). This uses the 2014 based household projections in accordance with the PPG. This is therefore a clear reasonable alternative.

*Scenario F: Economic Growth Scenario:* This reflects the Council's growth aspirations and its commitment to address the increasing problem of affordability of housing, particularly for Warrington's younger people and young families.



**Table 4.3: Housing targets and associated green belt release for the growth options**

	<b>Standard Methodology (2016 base)</b>	<b>Standard Methodology</b>	<b>Economic Growth scenario</b>
Annual requirement	<b>735</b>	<b>909</b>	<b>945</b>
2017 to 2037	14,700	18,180	18,900
Flexibility @ 10%	1,470	1,818	1,890
Total Requirement	16,170	19,998	20,790
Urban Capacity	13,726	13,726	13,726
Green Belt Requirement	<b>2,444</b>	<b>6,272</b>	<b>7,064</b>

- 4.3.4 These three scenarios are considered to be the reasonable alternatives at this stage. However, additional growth scenarios were tested at an early stage of plan making which therefore provides an understanding of a much wider range of growth options.
- 4.3.5 This included an assessment of a much higher release of Green Belt (13,390 dwellings), which is now considered to be unreasonable.
- 4.3.6 As per the initial growth scenarios (A, B and C), three distribution approaches have been tested for each of the new growth scenarios (D, E and F), to gain a better understanding of the potential sustainability effects.

**Table 4.4: The reasonable alternatives for housing growth and distribution**

<b>D. Government Standard Methodology (2016 base)</b>	<b>E. Government Standard Methodology (2014 base)</b>	<b>F. Proposed Plan target (SEP Uplift, 2017-2037)</b>
D1. Focus entirely on the Warrington urban area <i>2,444 dwellings to the urban fringes of Warrington</i>	E1. Focus entirely on the Warrington urban area <i>6,272 dwellings to the urban fringes of Warrington</i>	F1. Focus entirely on the Warrington urban area <i>7,064 dwellings to the urban fringes of Warrington</i>
D2. Incremental growth in settlements <i>1,100 dwellings in the outer settlements, 1344 dwellings to the urban fringes</i>	E2. Incremental growth in settlements <i>1,100 dwellings in the outer settlements</i> <i>5172 homes to the urban fringes</i>	F2. Incremental growth in settlements <i>1,100 dwellings in the outer settlements</i> <i>5'964 homes to the urban fringes</i>
D3. Increased dispersal of development to settlements <i>2,444 dwellings at the outer settlements</i>	E3. Increased dispersal of development to settlements <i>3500 dwellings at the outer settlements</i> <i>2772 dwellings to the urban fringes</i>	F3. Increased dispersal of development to settlements <i>4200 dwellings at the outer settlements</i> <i>2864 dwellings to the urban fringes</i>



### The Councils rationale for selecting the preferred approach

- 4.3.7 The Council sets out a detailed justification for the selection of the preferred approach in the Development Options and Site Assessment Technical Report. Its selection of the preferred approach has been informed by the SA/SEA process. The justification is summarised below, including outline reasons why the alternatives were discarded.
- 4.3.8 All these options under growth scenario E are considered to be inappropriate as they do not meet the full housing needs of the borough. Furthermore, the Council does not consider that there are exceptional circumstances to justify not meeting housing needs in full. In particular, the evidence demonstrates that the effects of a higher amount of green belt release are not significant enough to outweigh the benefits that would be achieved.
- 4.3.9 The Council considers that Growth Scenario F provides the best strategy for the Local Plan. It will better align with Warrington's growth aspirations, address identified affordability issues relating to younger households and provide an increase in the delivery of affordable housing. It only represents a relatively small increase in development over Scenario E and any additional environmental impacts will be able to be appropriately mitigated.
- 4.3.10 With regards to the broad distribution of development, the Council considers that the majority of development should be located at the edges of the main urban area, but alongside incremental growth in the outer settlements. This will achieve the sustainability of Warrington's growth as a whole, whilst supporting the long term vitality of the outlying settlements
- 4.3.11 Focusing entirely on the Warrington inner area would not provide the same benefits for the outlying settlements, and the additional growth in the urban area would not be likely to generate significantly different impacts in terms of socio economic development.
- 4.3.12 Conversely, greater dispersal to the outlying settlements would result in greater character impacts in the settlements, would promote a less sustainable form of growth and provides a weaker contribution to supporting the growth of the main urban area (which is a key objective of the Local Plan).
- 4.3.13 The preferred strategy for the Borough is therefore in broad alignment with Alternative F2.
- 4.3.14 The SA findings are broadly supportive of this approach. The findings demonstrate that the lower growth scenario could have negative effects on housing and economic growth, and this translates into lower overall benefits in terms of regeneration, health and wellbeing and the potential for infrastructure improvements.
- 4.3.15 Though the higher growth options would generate more negative effects, the majority of these would not be significant and could be mitigated.
- 4.3.16 With regards to distribution, the SA finds that the preferred approach would generate a more balanced range of positive effects across the borough. In terms of environmental impacts, the effects are not vastly different between the three distribution approaches.
- 4.3.17 The detailed appraisal findings are presented in full at **Appendix C**.

## 4.4 Consideration of main development locations for the spatial strategy

### Reconsidering the alternatives

4.4.1 As discussed in Section 4.3, three new growth scenarios were identified as reasonable alternatives following a review of the evidence base. These options re-evaluated the implications of different levels of growth in the urban area compared to the outlying settlements.

4.4.2 The Council concluded that the focus of development should still be within the urban area / fringes of Warrington and that there will be a requirement for approximately 6000 dwellings to be released in the Greenbelt in total (i.e. Alternative F2). However, several factors have led to the distribution of growth in the urban areas to be explored again:

1. The scale of growth is different to the previous level outlined in the draft spatial strategy as the preferred approach (i.e. the draft strategy proposed 1113dpa with 8,791 located on green belt land; but the final Plan proposes 945dpa, with approximately 7000 homes on Green Belt land). There may be different ways in which a lower level of growth could be distributed, and the implications may be different.
2. Comments received from consultation suggest that there are alternative approaches to distribution that ought to be tested as reasonable alternatives. Notably, this includes the approach of focusing some growth to the north of Warrington.

4.4.3 Consequently, the following options were established for appraisal. Several options propose broadly the same configurations of development across the urban area to corresponding options that were assessed at issues and options stage. However, the quantum of development is different, and so the effects have been re-considered.

**Option 1** - Garden Suburb to the south east of the Warrington of around 4,200 homes & urban extension to the south west of around 1,600 homes;

**Option 2** - Garden Suburb of around 4,200 homes & an urban extension to the west of Warrington of around 1,600 homes;

**Option 3** - Garden Suburb of around 4,200 homes & an urban extension to the north of around 1,600 homes;

**Option 4** – Garden Suburb of around 4,200 homes & dispersed Green Belt release adjacent to main urban area;

**Option 5** – Garden Suburb of around 2,400 homes, urban extension to the south west of around 1,600 homes and dispersed Green Belt release adjacent to main urban area; and

**Option 6** - A more dispersed pattern of Green Belt release adjacent to the main urban area.

A map has been prepared illustrating the indicative locations for growth for each of these options, and can be found at **Appendix E**.



#### Unreasonable options

- 4.4.4 Before the Preferred Development Option was consulted upon, the Council determined that development options to the north and east of the borough would be unreasonable approaches to strategic development.
- 4.4.5 This was determined through the area profile assessments and more detailed site assessment work, which demonstrated that:
- The sites in the east are subject to a number of environmental constraints, including the location of Peat, Rixton Moss Local Wildlife Site and part of the area being within Flood Zone 3.
  - The sites in the north raised environmental concerns given their proximity to the M62 and would effectively result in the urban area merging with Winwick, impacting on the character of the settlement.
- 4.4.6 The individual sites in these areas were however considered as potential development locations under the dispersed pattern of Green Belt release.
- 4.4.7 Following consultation on the Preferred Development Option, there were numerous comments suggesting that an urban extension to the north was considered to be a reasonable alternative. Additional site options were also proposed, which would allow for growth in to the north. In light of these factors, the Council has deemed it appropriate to test such an approach (as per Option 3 on the previous page).
- 4.4.8 The Council still considers that strategic growth to the east is unreasonable for the same reasons identified at draft spatial strategy stage.

#### The Councils rationale for selecting the preferred approach

- 4.4.9 The Councils preferred approach, taking into account the SA/SEA is broadly in-line with Option 1.
- 4.4.10 The Council has concluded that this option performs strongly across the majority of Local Plan Objectives. It is capable of meeting development needs and deliver infrastructure needed to support the development itself and contribute to the wider sustainable development of Warrington as a whole. Green Belt release can be facilitated without comprising the strategic importance of Warrington's Green Belt as a whole, with revised boundaries likely to be robust and durable beyond the Plan period.
- 4.4.11 The one area where Option 1 does not perform as well as the others is in respect of providing early housing delivery. The Council recognises that housing delivery from these sites is unlikely within the early years of the Local Plan period, given the lead in times for required infrastructure to support the two urban extensions. However, incremental growth in the outlying settlements, and continued development within the urban area itself will help to ensure that housing supply is maintained in the short term.
- 4.4.12 The Council rejected the alternative options for the following outline reasons.
- 4.4.13 **Option 2** did not perform as strongly due to concerns around the fragmented nature of available sites which may make infrastructure delivery more difficult and that

development is likely to impact on the strategic importance of the Green Belt between the main urban area of Warrington and Widnes. There are also concerns regarding the robustness of the revised Green Belt boundaries that would be created from development in the west.

- 4.4.14 **Option 3** did not perform as well due to concerns around the fragmented nature of available sites, which may make infrastructure delivery more difficult, the significant impact on the character of Winwick, transport issues in respect of Junction 9 of the M62/A49 and potential noise and air quality impacts from the motorway. Given the location and fragmented nature of the sites in the north, there is less scope to mitigate these impacts without a significant reduction in development capacity.
- 4.4.15 **Options 4, 5 and 6**, with more dispersed forms of development are less likely to be able to deliver the strategic and local infrastructure needed to support the development itself and contribute to the wider sustainable development of Warrington as a whole.
- 4.4.16 It is acknowledged that dispersed development would enable prioritisation of sites which had the lowest impact on the Green Belt, impact on character of the suburban area and on impact on existing natural, built and heritage assets.
- 4.4.17 However, given the scale of development required it is likely there will be impacts that will require mitigation. This may be more difficult to achieve with a larger number of smaller development sites. There may also be concerns regarding the robustness of revised Green Belt boundaries which may not provide as permanent a boundary as an urban extension defined by an A Road, Motorway or Ship Canal / River Mersey.
- 4.4.18 The SA is broadly supportive of the preferred approach, which concludes that an approach involving a Garden Suburb is more likely to achieve significant positive effects upon socio-economic factors when compared to the more dispersed approaches.
- 4.4.19 **Options 1-4** all involve a Garden Suburb, and so the differences in effects are minor. In some respects, Option 1 performs better than the alternatives; for example, it would be more likely to support regeneration in the inner parts of Warrington, it has a less profound effect upon the historic environment and air quality compared to **Option 3** and has a lesser impact upon landscape character and Green Belt compared to **Option 2**.
- 4.4.20 Whilst these differences are not major, it is clear that the preferred approach presents a reasonable strategy for the delivery of housing growth within Warrington over the Plan period.
- 4.4.21 For further detail, the appraisal findings for the options assessment are presented in full at **Appendix F**.



## 6 APPRAISAL FINDINGS: SITE OPTIONS

### 6.1 Introduction

- 6.1.1 The Council considers that there is a need to allocate strategic sites for employment and housing land development in the Plan. This is necessary to ensure that housing and employment needs will be met in the Plan period.
- 6.1.2 A key element of the spatial strategy is to maximise brownfield redevelopment, but this does not satisfy the overall demand for land identified in the evidence. Therefore, there was a need to consider Green Belt sites and whether they can make a contribution to these needs without having unacceptable effects on Green Belt.

#### The site options

- 6.1.3 In order to inform the plan making process a range of site options have been appraised throughout the SA process. These are outlined in table 6.1 below, which also summarises how the site assessments have influenced the decision making process.

**Table 6.1:** Summary of the site assessment process

Site options	Details	Input to decision making
All of the 'call for sites' and SHLAA Green Belt sites adjacent to the main urban area.	Undertaken by AECOM in support of the LPPO consultation (additional sites received during/following the LPPO consultation were appraised using the same methodology.	Helped to understand the implications of each of the strategic spatial options from the 'bottom up'.  To guide the allocation of specific sites with regards to the focus on the main urban area of Warrington.
Strategic sites in the urban area (i.e. Peel Hall).	Undertaken by AECOM following the LPPO consultation.	To demonstrate the high level constraints and opportunities of the site to allow for a consistent comparison with other site options throughout the borough.
All of the 'call for sites' and SHLAA Green Belt sites at the outer settlements.	Undertaken by ARUP in addition to their Green Belt assessment. The SA site appraisal framework was applied consistently as part of the wider review process.	To guide the allocation of specific sites at each of the outer settlements.
Employment site options	Undertaken by AECOM and the Council.	Helped to understand the implications of the growth options at a site specific level.  Guided the allocation of specific sites / parcels of land at key employment locations.

- 6.1.4 It is important to note that whilst these are individual site options (and have been appraised as such), understanding their characteristics, constraints and opportunities is considered to be helpful in understanding the potential effects of the strategic options. However, it is also important to acknowledge that the issues identified at a site specific level do not necessarily reflect the effects that would occur with strategic growth in a particular location. For example, site specific issues (such as poor access to a school) could possibly be dealt with through the infrastructure improvements that would likely accompany strategic growth (i.e. development at multiple sites).
- 6.1.5 Each site option has been appraised against the site appraisal framework as set out in **Appendix A**.
- 6.1.6 The findings of the appraisals are summarised below in a series of matrices. Detailed proformas for each site option, including a map of the site location and boundaries are contained within separate reports.
- 6.1.7 **Summary of site appraisal findings**
- 6.1.8 Tables 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4 below illustrate the scores for each site option against the site appraisal criteria.
- 6.1.9 Figures 6.1 and 6.2 which follow the summary tables present maps of all the housing and employment sites that have been considered throughout the SA process, differentiating between those that have been proposed for allocation and those that have not.





Mitigation likely to be required/  
unavoidable impacts

Mitigation may be required/ unavoidable  
impacts

Unlikely to have a major impact on  
trends

Promotes sustainable growth

Reference	Location	EC1. Loss of employment land	EC2. Distance to Principal Road Network	EC3. How close to key employment sites	HW1. Supported by community facilities	HW2. Access to local natural greenspace	HW3. Access to formal play space	ACC1. Access to nearest primary school	ACC2. Access to nearest secondary school	ACC3. How well served is the site by a bus	ACC4. How accessible is site to train Station	ACC5. Distance to GP service/ health centre	HO1. Will development meet housing need	NR1. Potential impacts on air quality	NR2. Remediation of contaminated land	NR3. Loss of High Quality Agricultural Land	NR4. Groundwater Source Protection Zone	NR5. Site within identified flood zone	RU3. Potential to safeguard/ sterilise minerals	BNH1. Proximity to designated heritage assets	BNH2. Effect upon heritage assets	BNH3. Capacity for landscape to accommodate	BG1. Impact on European Site/ SPA/ SAC	BG2. Potential impact on a SSSI	BG3. Potential impact on Local Wildlife Site	BG4. Potential impact on TPOs	RU1. Use of previously developed land	RU2. Access to HWRC				
R18/P2/039	Field behind Hunters Moon, Barleycastle Lane																															
R18/P2/051	Land at Nook Farm, Arley Road																															
R18/P2/052	Land at Barondale Grange, Stockport Road																															
R18/P2/077	Land NE of Knutsford Road																															
R18/P2/083	Peel Hall, south of the M62																															
R18/P2/094	Land north and south of Weaste Lane																															
R18/P2/102	Land at Deans Wharf, Thelwall																															
R18/P2/105	Old Rectory, Church Lane, Grappenhall																															
R18/P2/116	Land adj Yew Tree Farm, Grappenhall																															
R18/P2/119	Land at Broad Lane, Grappenhall																															

9.5.36 **ENV4 and ENV5** are concerned with the extraction of minerals. The policies are broadly a continuation of the existing policy context, and therefore significant effects would not be anticipated. The policies are not overly restrictive, nor would they allow development that would be disruptive to businesses. As a result neutral effects are predicted.

9.5.37 **ENV6 Restoration and Aftercare of Minerals and Waste Sites:** The policy will help to secure appropriate end uses for extraction sites, which could include restoration for agricultural uses, forestry, recreation and other land uses. These could all potentially have positive effects with regards to the support of economic activity.

9.5.38 **ENV7 Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Development:** The policy is predicted to have a neutral effect as it does not facilitate the development of energy schemes as such.

9.5.39 **ENV8 Environmental and Amenity Protection:** The policy could act as a barrier to certain employment development near existing communities. However, it is unlikely to be a significant issue with regards to the delivery of employment land.

Overall effects of the Environment Policies

9.5.40 Overall a minor positive effect is predicted as certain policies will contribute positively towards sustainable economic growth.

Strategic Site Policies

Policies	MD1	MD2	MD3	MD4	Overall Significance
Broad Implications	↑	↑	↑	↑?	+

9.5.41 **MD1 Waterfront (Including Port Warrington):** The Policy is predicted to have a minor positive effect by providing additional details to support residential and employment growth at this site. In particular, the policy sets out the requirement for substantial infrastructure improvements which will support skills development (new education facilities) jobs, and accessibility improvements. There would also be provision of a large scale Country Park which could help to attract visitors.

9.5.42 **MD2 Garden Suburb:** The policy is predicted to have a minor positive effect by providing additional details to support residential and employment growth across several new villages. In particular, the policy sets out the requirement for substantial infrastructure improvements which will support skills development (new education facilities) jobs, and accessibility improvements. There would also be provision of a large scale park which could help to attract visitors.

9.5.43 **MD3 South Garden Village:** The policy is predicted to have a minor positive effect by providing additional details to support residential growth. In particular, the policy sets out the requirement for substantial infrastructure improvements which will support skills development (new education facilities) jobs, and accessibility improvements.

9.5.44 There would also be provision of enhanced access to the Bridgewater Canal as a visitor attraction, which could have some economic benefits.



9.5.45 **MD4 Peel Hall:** The policy sets out a requirement to deliver contributions towards infrastructure improvements (mostly off site). This is of slight benefit to the local economy.

9.5.46 Overall, the policies are predicted to have **minor positive effects** by supporting local economic growth, opportunities for tourism, and improvements to facilities to help support education and skills development.

Site specific policies for the outer settlements

Policies	OS1	OS2	OS3	OS4	OS5	OS6	OS7	OS8	OS9	Overall Significance
<i>Broad Implications</i>	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	+

9.5.47 These policies relate to residential development, and so the implications with regards to economic growth and regeneration are unlikely to be significant in respect of employment land. The provision of community facilities, open space and infrastructure improvements ought to have positive effects in terms of supporting local communities and local spending. Overall, **minor positive effects** are predicted.

M1 Monitoring and Review Policy

Policies	M1	Overall Significance
<i>Broad Implications</i>	↑	+

9.5.48 The policy sets out measures that will be taken to boost the supply of housing in the event that the annual target is not being achieved. This is a positive step for the economy as it will help to ensure that housing delivery is maintained (which will support jobs in this industry as well as providing sufficient accommodation for the local workforce). **Minor positive effects** are predicted.