

PROTECT OUR GREENBELT AND SAVE OUR VILLAGE

Name Graham Meizer

Address _____

Address to:-

Planning Officer, Local Plan, Planning, Policy and Programmes, Warrington Borough Council, New Town House, Buttermarket Street, Warrington, WA1 2NH

The following statements are just a "short version" of my objections and concerns and more evidence can be found in the Burtonwood and Collins Green Action Group's file.

You cannot fail to see the open countryside and the Beauty all around you in Burtonwood and Collins Green. Feel the benefit of the fresh air and appreciate the value of a slow paced village life and tight community. All of that is under threat from a proposed development set to go ahead in 2020. Further developments are being proposed that could see our beautiful rural village evolve into an urban town. Below are some objections to the plan.

(1) CONSULTATION

The proposals for the development are vague and unclear. Many residents didn't get letters and those that did were not addressed by name. The venue for the consultation was not accessible to all and the means to complain long winded and complicated. Communication and information is lacking and appears to be mainly online based, not everyone is online. Developers and planners have access to consultants and resources, we don't. It is a highly unequal and undemocratic process. The council have a duty of care to liaise with neighbouring authorities to determine overall effects of congestion and road safety. There is little evidence of this having happened.

(2) INFRASTRUCTURE

Both hard infrastructure roads, bridges, railways etc and soft infrastructure- health, doctors, dentists, social services, education, parks and recreational facilities, law enforcement, emergency services and mental health will be affected by this and further proposed developments. Burtonwood and Collins Green do not have the infrastructure to support this development. Northern trust have said that if only 150 houses are approved the figure will be 'too limited to viably deliver the housing, open space, and, specific support for expansion of primary school facilities and primary care' In other words, no contribution to changing infrastructure unless more houses are approved. Which means longer waits for doctors, dentists, community nurse, counselling etc. School places in catchment areas no longer guaranteed.

(3) GREENBELT OVER BROWNFIELDS

The release of greenbelt has not been adequately justified and the reasoning for not using brownfields is unacceptable. The council should be forcing development on brownfields or previously developed land before any greenbelt is released. The plan involves loss of versatile agricultural land which leads to loss of income for tenant farmers. The plan relies too heavily on representations and assurances from land owners and developers.

(4) ENVIRONMENTAL—TRAFFIC— AIR POLLUTION

There appears to have been no assessment of traffic movement on Green Lane-Phipps Lane over a sustained period of time. The proposed entrance to the new development will be on Green Lane. Green lane is already critical for residents, children and parents on their way too and from school. With 160 houses comes approx. 320 more cars on the road at peak times. Couple this with other local developments and this is a recipe for

gridlock on our roads. Our children will be walking and cycling amongst this traffic which is not only physically dangerous but also has serious health connotations.

Warrington has one of the most congested road networks in the country. Air pollution in Warrington is already amongst the worst in the UK. The proposed access point to the new development is on green Lane opposite Burtonwood County Primary School. The increase in traffic on the lane will be immense. The pollutants in the air around our children and entering their lungs will massively increase. Children are more susceptible to pollutants than adults and exposure could cause or exacerbate ailments such as asthma and COPD. Adults are more susceptible to heart and lung disease and respiratory conditions such as emphysema.

(5) LOSS OF WILDLIFE HABITATS

Drastic loss of wildlife habitat (frogs, newts, toads, bats, woodpeckers, sparrows, starlings blue tits, foxes, rabbits and hares etc) is being treated like it doesn't matter. Britain has already lost half its wildlife, wildlife adds value and natural beauty to our environment and provides respite from everyday stresses. This development will decimate the local wildlife we love to watch.

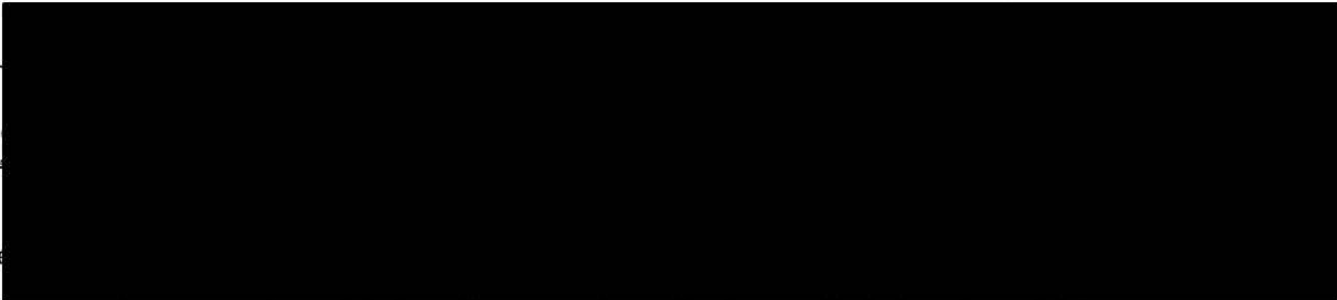
I object to the proposed development plan on points 1, 2, 3, 4 + 5

Additional Comments

I shall be following this response with a long email of my own to the Borough Council, reiterating but expanding upon the points raised above in order to express my opinions more forcefully.

I agree to the above statements and reflect my views and those as coordinated at our local meetings that formulate our objections as to the proposed building plan.

Signed _____
Date _____
Telephone _____



Letters of objection need to be with the Planning Officer before 5:00 pm on Monday 17th June 2019.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Local Plan](#)
Subject: Objections to the Council's plans to build housing on green belt land
Date: 17 June 2019 09:31:03
Attachments: Email to WBC.docx

Dear Sir/Madam,

The attached email is a response to the planned building of houses on green belt land in Warrington, with particular regard to the Burtonwood area.

[REDACTED] the area's semi-rural nature, with a farm field opposite and other farmland and country parks nearby. Much of which is now under threat.

The email lists our oppositions to the Borough Council's plans. I hope, however much you and/or anyone else at the WBC might disagree with the opinions expressed, it will be taken seriously and not deleted or ignored. I intend to share it with Helen Jones, my MP, and with anyone in Burtonwood who might care to read it.

Sincerely,

Graham Mercer, [REDACTED]

"We have two lives,
And the second begins when you realise that we only have one."

1945)

- Mario de Andrade (San Paulo, 1893 -

Personal Responses to the Warrington Borough Council's Plans to Build on Local Green Belt Land.

1) Differing perspectives

It is obvious that most local residents, the Borough Council and (in the case of Burtonwood) the land-owners at the Northern Trust Company have vastly differing viewpoints. Northern Trust's main objective is to make money and the Borough Council's is to build houses to comply with central government demands, thus catering for a genuine need for extra housing as quickly and as painlessly (to themselves) as possible. Irrespective, to a large extent, of how we locals feel.

I personally find the Northern Trust's statement that they will "robustly argue" for the release of green belt land and its allocation for residential development confrontational. It is the language of the corporate bully. I – and I am sure many others in the Burtonwood area - would love to know what kind of houses and locations this company's executive officers inhabit. Not to mention some members of Warrington Borough Council (which from now I will refer to as "WBC").

From the start, it appears that both Northern Trust and the WBC are determined to press ahead with their building plans irrespective of the views of the people of Burtonwood – despite the WBC's somewhat disputed claims regarding "consultation" (When asked to raise their hands if they had only just, or only very recently, heard of the development plans the great majority of people in the Burtonwood Club, at the public meeting there in May, raised their hands). The meeting, incidentally, was so well-attended that many people couldn't even get into the room where it was being held.

2) Legalities

WBC stresses the importance of the legality, actual or alleged, of developing green belt land, and so, presumably, does Northern Trust. But then the WBC and Northern Trust hold all the aces when it comes to legal matters. They have access to legal advice and the money to pay for it, a privilege denied to most residents. How are we to know when laws are being ignored, circumvented or flouted? And how, in these circumstances, can we legally defend our attempts to save the locality's precious green belt? It is an essentially unfair contest.

On the subject of legality, and focussing for the moment on Collins Green, we were informed, [REDACTED] that the field opposite (between Penny Lane and Forshaws Lane) could not be built upon due to the oil pipeline that passes beneath it.

Was that the case? If so, when and how was the law changed to allow development on land covering a potentially dangerous gas hazard? And in an area that is subject also to subsidence due to coal mining activity in the recent

past? If this field is used for new housing, will the people moving in be informed of these potential hazards?

3) Loss of Sense of Place and Community

Burtonwood has been a village since Mediaeval times and beyond. Its people have long been proud and possessive about its village status and are strenuously opposed to that status, and the strong community spirit that it engenders, being taken from them by people that many of them see, rightly or wrongly, as uncaring and unimaginative bureaucrats. No locals, as far as I know, want Burtonwood to become yet another drab, over-populated suburb of Warrington. Yet this is what will happen if the planned building goes ahead.

A strong, well-defined sense of place is of huge importance to people living in such a relatively small locality. Anyone who knows Burtonwood and its inhabitants will be aware of this tenacious emotional and social cohesiveness. And should therefore expect strong - and ongoing - opposition to any plans that threaten to destroy it. Northern Trust will find a very “robustly argued” response to their “robustly argued” intentions, and so will WBC.

4) The Green Belt.

The Green Belt was established in 1955 primarily to stop (not merely delay) the spread of urban sprawl. In 2010 it was estimated to cover only 13% of England. This alone should bid developers and councils pause when considering to reduce it further, though sadly it will not. It is only the will of the people that will change things, but that will is strengthening year by year, as developers and councils throughout England are discovering. Both, I am afraid to say, are held in low regard by many of the people that the council (and Parliament) claim to represent.

In addition to preventing urban sprawl the green belt provides physical, emotional and aesthetic relief from otherwise overwhelming environmental suffocation. It also represents, to local people, a vital connection with the land and the countryside, once such an important factor in the lives of most English people.

██ even people employed in the coal mines and factories retained this love and respect for the land, spending much of their limited leisure hours in their tiny gardens or plots, or on walks and picnics in the nearby fields and woods.

Yet today’s councillors at WBC, who no doubt see themselves as caring, civilised and reasonably well-educated beings, do not seem to share such an affinity and are prepared to sacrifice much of our local natural heritage as part of a “quick-fix”, “easy-way-out” solution.

They insist that they only intend (for now!) to release 10% of Warrington’s green belt. As if 10% is a mere trifle. But there is a phrase, derived from the Latin, for reducing something by one tenth. It is “to decimate”. WBC is planning to decimate our much-valued green belt – let us be clear about that.

In one of their leaflets they talk of releasing only “parts of the green belt that are performing poorly”. Who on Earth coined this absurd expression? It is typical bureaucrat-speak. How can fields that produce economy-boosting crops, that help to make Burtonwood a village rather than a suburb, that give shelter and sustenance to a broad range of wild creatures, some of them critically endangered, that harbour a variety of trees and wildflowers and that the people of Burtonwood love and value be dismissed as “poorly performing”? As if the fields are somehow playing badly in a kind of Monty Pythonesque World Cup competition!

5) Devastation of Wildlife Populations, Trees and Wildflowers due to Habitat Loss

The greatest threat to wildlife across the world, together with climate change, is habitat loss. Many thousands of species of animals and birds are threatened with extinction, not just rhinos, elephants, tigers, polar bears or blue whales. UN scientists warn that roughly *one million plant and animal species are on the verge of extinction* (the italics are mine). Of these, many are found in Britain. Including Burtonwood. A 2016 State of Nature report found Britain to be “among the most nature-depleted countries in the world”. And the Warrington area, already built-up and industrialised a century ago, must feature among the worst.

The green belt land around Burtonwood is not only important to the wildlife, wildflowers and trees that actually thrive on or around it but also acts as a vital buffer zone between the green belt’s more vulnerable areas and the various housing estates that encroach upon it. Any conservationist worth his or her salt knows the importance of such buffer zones.

Creatures currently found on and around the threatened green belt land in Burtonwood include (and I only mention species in *serious decline*):

Mammals (at least 9 species are known to exist in and around the fields in question but only the critically endangered ones are listed below).

Brown Hare (80% reduction since about 1920); Hedgehog (30 million in 1950s Britain, 1.5 million today); Vole (“vulnerable to extinction”).

Amphibians (critically endangered ones only)

Common Frog (“In decline since the 1970s”); Common Toad (“Seriously threatened”); Great Crested Newt (“60% decline since 1960s”).

Birds (over 50 species have been recorded in or above the green belt land earmarked for development in Burtonwood but only those on the ICUN Red List – ie “Critically Endangered”, “Endangered” or “Vulnerable.” are listed below)

Corn Bunting; Fieldfare; Grey Partridge; Grey Wagtail; Herring Gull; House Sparrow; Lapwing (once the logo of Burtonwood Brewery because it was so common in the area); Linnet; Meadow Pipit; Mistle Thrush; Redwing; Skylark; Song Thrush; Starling; Tree Sparrow; Yellow Hammer; Yellow Wagtail. All of these, remember, on the “Red List” of endangered species.

Insects (seriously endangered types only)

Various butterflies; (“76% of British resident and migrant populations in serious decline”); moths (“28% decline in numbers since 1968”); Bees (“one third of British wild bees in decline”; dragon flies (“36% of the various species in decline”).

Trees and Wild Flowers

According to the government’s advisors on climate change tree planting in the UK must “double by 2020”, in order to even begin reversing the catastrophic effects of climate change. At the moment only 13% of the UK’s total land area has tree cover (Just over one third of the average area covered elsewhere in the European Union).

Yet the WBC seems bent on reducing tree cover considerably in the Burtonwood area. The green belt areas earmarked for development not only include long hedgerows that provide shelter, food and safe nesting for a variety of bird species, as well as harbouring many species of plants vital to butterflies, bees and other insects, but also, in certain places, mature trees. They include Horse Chestnut, Sycamore, Poplar, Silver Birch, Hawthorn, Blackthorn and Privet.

Wildflower species are too numerous to list in full but include daffodils, bluebells, forget-me-nots, self-heal, red campion, white dead-nettle, buttercups, garlic mustard, ragwort, dandelions (essential for bees because of their early flowering), clover (another vital plant for bees), daisies and great swathes of Queen Anne’s Lace, an umbellifer that TV gardener Monty Don calls “...one of the glories of the British countryside” and that is so important to many insects including bees and hoverflies. Insects, incidentally, that help provide an essential food source for many birds.

6) Crime, Vandalism and Anti-Social Behaviour

I don’t know how Burtonwood compares with areas elsewhere when it comes to crime, vandalism and anti-social behaviour but I do know that the level of such activities in the locality is already at unacceptable levels for any community that regards itself as civilised. I have often seen, on locally based social media, reports of burglary, car theft, drug-related incidents and anti-social behaviour. Even in Collins Green, a hamlet rather than a village, I know three people who have been burgled in the past three years, all of them old or elderly (one in her nineties) and living alone. And I regularly see examples of littering, fly-tipping and dog-fouling as well as vandalism (especially the smashing up of bus stops). Plus traffic offences such as vehicles ignoring speed or weight limits.

I am not suggesting that the burglaries, car-thefts etc were carried out by people from Burtonwood – most of those responsible are never apprehended so we never get to know. But many of the lesser offences are “home-grown”, as most people, I hope, would admit.

Whatever the case, we would be naive to think that such offences will not increase if the planned developments, and the population increase that will

come with them, go ahead. Bringing greater stress and insecurity to the largely respectable, law-abiding people of Burtonwood. Policing of the area, already badly strained, would also be subjected to even greater pressures.

7) Increased Traffic and its Associated Problems

Traffic in the Burtonwood area has increased noticeably since [REDACTED]. The local lanes (none of the area's main thoroughfares are designated as "roads", as a glance at a map will confirm) were not built for the volume or type of traffic that now use them.

This is already causing problems, not only in Burtonwood Village itself but elsewhere, especially in places such as Green Lane, with its Elementary School, many parked cars along the kerbside and its often ignored 20 mph limit; Phipps Lane (by the junction with Green Lane) where cars parked at school opening and closing times reduce passage to little more than a car width); and Forshaw's Lane, where its junctions with Collins Green Lane and Phipps Lane are both hazardous because of reduced visibility due to bends and (in summer) overgrown hedgerows.

Green Lane, (with two large fields - one on either side - earmarked for development), will be particularly susceptible to increased traffic when it is already (see above para.) under pressure.

In addition to the problems caused by too many vehicles in too small a space, and on country lanes rather than highways, there will obviously be increased air pollution – that in Green Lane being in the vicinity of a school attended by many young children.

8) Shortage of Facilities/Amenities

Within living memory the hamlet of Collins Green had a railway station, a pub, a fish-and-chip shop, a post office, four or five shops (including a Co-op), plus a garage with filling station and a brewery. We now have just the brewery and the pub and even the pub always seems threatened with closure.

Meanwhile Burtonwood Village, with its much higher population, is doing little better. Not the fault of the WBC of course but their planned developments will surely exacerbate the situation. The excellent little post office has already been downsized and relocated to a section of the small library and it is said that the Patterdale Lodge surgery on Clay Lane is soon to be closed. Things like this are bad enough already but when many more people are housed in the area they will be far worse.

Alternative surgeries are already feeling the pressure. I don't know how bad things are at the Village Surgery by Kinnock Park but at the surgery on Legh St. in Earlestown (an important alternative) it now takes noticeably longer to see a doctor and much longer to see a doctor of your choice. Things will get worse if the planned housing estates are established.

9) Alternatives to Green Belt Acquisitions

The obvious alternative to ruining green belt land is to build on brown-field sites. Developers, as we all know, cynically try to avoid this as it involves more work and expenses. They would much rather take the easy way out, spend less money and destroy the green belt.

I – and I’m sure many other people – do not believe that the WBC has exhausted all brown-field possibilities in the Warrington area. They need to reassess this situation asap and put a stop to further development until they can prove beyond doubt that no further brown-field sites, now or in the near future, are available.

Meanwhile, exactly how many existing properties in the Warrington area have been unoccupied for a year or more? Could the WBC please tell us? Nationwide in the UK more than 11,000 homes have been empty for 10 years or more. And there are 216,000 homes across the country that have been empty for at least 6 months.

despite complaints to the Council – it was, we were told about three years ago, “not at the top of our priorities.” Thankfully I am informed that the council is – at last - reconsidering.

Finally, it seems to me that the obvious solution to a housing shortage without appropriating green belt land is to build upwards instead of outwards. Why does the WBC constantly build 2-storey housing estates, often with lawns, when blocks of flats have a much smaller footprint? I am not talking of hideous 1950s-style tower blocks but smaller, more imaginatively designed places with balconies, rooftop terraces etc. People might prefer two-storey accommodation or bungalows but we cannot carry on building new estates in a vastly over-crowded country (Warrington has a population density of 10.7 people per hectare, compared with India’s population density of 4.16 per hectare!). Surely people desperate to get on the housing ladder appreciate that they cannot always get the housing that they prefer right away, but if necessary can upgrade later? living in various flats without serious problems or regrets.

Graham Mercer, June 2019