

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Local Plan](#)
Subject: Response to Local Plan
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12th June 2019

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

Dear Sirs

Re: Local Plan – Grappenhall & Appleton Thorn

I wish to challenge the draft Local Plan for Grappenhall & Appleton Thorn because it is not sound and will completely change the nature of this beautiful and historic landscape forever.

1. The Plan would considerably reduce the Green Belt in this area. Green Belt is a government policy for controlling urban growth. The concept is for a ring of countryside where urbanisation will be resisted for the foreseeable future, maintaining an area where agriculture, potential forestry and outdoor leisure can prevail. Green belt also provides an essential habitat for wildlife, which is diminishing rapidly. Green belt offers many **benefits** for both urban and rural population, including mental well-being. The green belt is good, positive planning. It stops urban sprawl and encourages the vital regeneration of declining large towns, like Warrington. It also protects the setting of our historic settlements (e.g. Grappenhall, Thelwall and Appleton Thorn). Sprawl has many negative impacts, including loss of farmland and wildlife, increased car use, increased pollution, loss of beautiful landscape and neglect of older towns (i.e. Warrington).

Paul Miner, planning campaign manager at the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), says that the benefits of protecting green belt land, and how

using brownfield sites can help tackle the country's housing crisis. His discussion follows:

- Green belt is good, positive planning. It stops urban sprawl and encourages the vital regeneration of our largest towns and cities. It provides the countryside next door to the local population and protects the setting of many of our historic settlements. And, though not the principal purpose, it protects the attractive landscapes so important to our environment, heritage and wellbeing.
- Building new houses on green belt land severely underestimates the wide range of benefits that the green belt offers, and would lead to the urban sprawl that the green belt was precisely designed to prevent. It would also make countryside harder to access by public transport.
- Green belt land often includes significant local biodiversity and heritage assets, but it also captures carbon, provides space for water to prevent flooding, and protects the water supply. The Natural Capital Committee in January 2015 called for the creation of 250,000 hectares of woodland and 100,000 hectares of wetland close to urban areas. The best way to achieve this is to maintain existing green belt policy, rather than weaken it.
- Furthermore, most of the green belt is in agricultural use. This is considered to be of environmental value when global population growth and climate change are putting increasing pressure on land, and when we grow less than two-thirds of our own food. Now, more than ever, we need to avoid unnecessarily losing our countryside.
- The solution we should be pursuing is the redevelopment of brownfield sites – ‘previously developed’ land. Derelict sites within Warrington BC and close to existing economic and social opportunities should not be ignored in favour of cheaper or more convenient sites for developers.
- Crucially, there is plenty of brownfield land available for development. In November 2014, a CPRE report found that there were enough sites to accommodate at least one million new homes – even after setting aside those brownfield sites that were of recreational or wildlife value, or could be developed for other purposes such as employment. In addition, more than 400,000 homes already have planning permission on such sites. Significantly, the research also found that brownfield land is far from drying up: more brownfield land became available between 2010 and 2012 than was developed. Warrington BC needs to investigate available brownfield sites for housing development rather than increasingly encroach on land designated as green belt. There really is no need for either major releases of green belt land or wholesale changes to policy, when we have such a plentiful range of other options available.

2. The Secretary of State has told us that the government methodology is a suggested starting point – it is not a target that has to be met! The population rate is changing and the latest figures needs to be used when assessing the need for new homes.

3. Brown site land should always be used first when building new homes. This is especially true for Warrington, which is in dire need of regeneration of the Town Centre. New homes nearer the centre would help our shops and businesses to thrive, not close down or move elsewhere as we have seen in recent decades in Warrington. Brown field sites will remain undeveloped if urban sprawl onto prime farmland and green belt is allowed.

4. Warrington relies on the old infrastructure. Although dual carriageways have been built in the northern suburbs, the town centre itself and the main roads leading into the town centre are single-carriageway, together with some one-way systems creating grid-lock at peak times. Roads leading into Warrington from the south (Wilderspool Causeway, London Road, Chester Road, Knutsford Road) are single carriageway. Building 5000 new houses on the southern outskirts of the Borough, could potentially add another 15,000 cars onto these roads. Plus, the proposed Warehouses and associated lorries, wagons and employees cars, will cause extra congestion, increase air pollution. Removing valued Green Belt with hard landscape and congestion is not an attractive option for existing local residents. It will be much easier for new residents to travel on the nearby motorways to the established and wonderful cities of Chester, Liverpool and Manchester – all within easy reach. We don't need another city. The BC Local Plan is unsound and unsustainable.

5. The existing character of rural south Warrington has much to be applauded. Its history is unique, from Dinosaur footprints, Roman settlements, entries in the Domesday Book of Thelwall, Grappenhall (Gropenhale) and Appleton Thorn. These small and attractive villages of Thelwall, Grappenhall and Appleton Thorn are steeped in history. Thelwall was the lowest crossing of the Mersey and protected from the invasion by the Danes; Thelwall, was granted the charter of a City by King Edward the Elder in 923; St Wilfrid's church in Grappenhall, is built on the site of a the 12th Century church; the cat on the wall of St Wilfrid's was an inspiration for Lewis Carroll's grinning Cheshire Cat in Alice in Wonderland; Appleton Thorn village is the only village in England where the 'Bawming of the Thorn' ceremony takes place. The thorn tree, which stands beside the church, is believed to be an offshoot of the Glastonbury thorn, which grew from the staff of Joseph of Arimathea. Adam de Dutton, a knight of the Crusades and local landowner, brought it to Appleton.

The cancer of new houses and logistics warehouses on Green Belt land has the potential to spread rapidly, the green lungs of the landscape, choked. The prognosis is terminal for south Warrington residents, the town centre, the environment and for wildlife. Is this what you are trying to achieve?

Overall, the Local Plan is not sound, nor environmentally sustainable. The rural character of south Warrington and its history is likely to be lost and forgotten. There is no justification for the loss of Green Belt. The Local Plan will exacerbate Warrington's problems, not solve them. You need to be more innovative and think more strategically to solve problems – and this Plan fails to deliver.

Yours faithfully

Marjorie E Lowe and Victoria Hames

