



27th April 2019

Director of Planning
Planning Policy and Programmes
Warrington Borough Council
New Town House
Buttermarket Street
Warrington
WA4 2NH

Dear Sir

Warrington Borough Council Local Plan Consultation

I have reviewed the above plan and would like to submit a number of comments.

As I understand the position the major intervention proposed in the draft plan is the development of a new Garden City Suburb comprising 5000 new homes and 116ha of employment land between Knutsford Road and London Road linking the existing urban area to the M56. This new development will almost exclusively be on land currently protected as green belt.

The local plan acknowledges that Warrington's roads, schools and health facilities are currently at capacity and that a development which could accommodate something of the order of 20,000 people and 13,000 cars plus commercial traffic could not be feasible without significant investment in both transport and public services.

I have a number of reservations about the Plan.

1. Forecast Demand for Housing and employment Space.

The Local Housing Needs Assessment and Employment Land Forecasts do not seem to take into account the effect of the successful regeneration

of Manchester and Liverpool will have on the future demand for residential and employment land in Warrington. Historically Warrington has benefited from the industrial decline of Manchester and Liverpool as people and jobs moved out of the conurbations. This resurgence of the economies of the main cities in the North West is likely to limit or reduce this flow and this important structural change needs to be reflected in the future demand assessments.

The densities proposed in the plan do not seem very ambitious. The National Planning Policy Framework suggests that significantly increased minimum densities should be established in town centres and in other locations well served by public transport.

Reflecting the structural change taking place in the North Wests economy and increasing densities will reduce the area of housing and employment land required during the period of the plan.

2. Release of Green Belt Land.

The 2012 Local Plan Core Strategy, prepared by Warrington Borough Council, sets out the aims of protecting the green belt, developing sites and services in locations accessible by public transport, accommodating 80% of development on brownfield land and reducing the impact of traffic on air quality. The proposed Garden City Suburb is largely located on green belt land, is not brownfield, is not accessible by public transport and will contribute to deterioration in air quality. It does not therefore meet any of the 2012 criteria.

The National Planning Policy Framework provides that once established green belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances and it is not clear from the current plan why such a major departure from these policies is justified. In particular there is no evidence of discussions with neighboring authorities on accommodating the identified need for development land.

The 2012 plan envisages maintaining the green belt until at least 2032 with a view to preventing urban sprawl, focusing investment in the urban area, to facilitate regeneration and prevent adjoining towns coalescing. These objectives remain of critical importance and the preferred development option does not provide sufficient justification to make the major change envisaged to the green belt.

3. Protection against air pollution provided by the Green Belt.

Maintaining the green belt is perhaps more important than it was in 2012 in the light of the recognition of the effect that poor air quality has on public health. The green belt provides an important protection against the pollution coming from the motorways surrounding Warrington. The preferred development option would effectively remove this “green lung” protecting the town from the M56 and M6 pollution.

4. Provision of New transport infrastructure and Public Services.

Having examined the criteria for the Government’s Garden City programme it would appear that the initiative is based on the concept of sustainable development. It is hard to see how the proposed development of a huge new suburb, which is separated from its town centre by the major barrier provided by the ship canal and provides no access to public transport infrastructure can meet these sustainability criteria. Development of this scale should at the very least provide a viable alternative to the use of the car such as access to the rail network and a new crossing of the ship canal.

The plan recognises that strategic road infrastructure may be required but is vague on the any details. The plan further suggests that no development of the garden city suburb will take place until a new strategic road is provided. I am skeptical that these proposals will survive contact with market reality. The new strategic road infrastructure and public services will be a cost to the public sector in a time of austerity whereas there will be a huge financial incentive for owners whose land has been removed from the green belt to assiduously work the planning system to ensure the early release of their land for development. There is a real risk therefore that the Garden City Suburb allocation will place intolerable pressure on roads and public services which are already operating at capacity.

5. The Effect of the Preferred Development Option on Local Communities

The plan would fundamentally alter the nature of Thellwall, Grappenhall, Appleton and Appleton Thorne. There would be a real risk that they would lose their local character and be subsumed in a gigantic area of urban sprawl.

6. Employment land Allocation in the Garden Suburb.

The recently announced schemes promoted by Langtree and Stobarts suggest that entire allocation will be taken up by large scale warehouses. Warrington already has a major logistics development at Omega on the M62. The plan does not provide any evidence from the Omega scheme on whether this type of development provides well paid employment for local residents. The loss of important green belt land to provide minimum wage jobs for people not resident in Warrington is hard to justify. Targeting new employment development on higher skilled less land hungry uses would seem to be more in keeping with the plans stated objectives.

In the light of the real problems with the preferred development option I would urge you to reconsider your proposals. My own view is that if the release of green belt land can ultimately be justified it would be more sensible to allocate development on the town centre side of the ship canal and where ready access can be gained to the rail network. The land between Birchwood station and the ship canal presents one such opportunity.

I hope that you find the above comments of assistance and would be grateful if you would kindly keep me informed of the Council's response to the consultations.

I have copied this letter to Councillor Biggin .

Yours Faithfully



David Shelton