

**Trams for Warrington
Respondent Number 0395**

Submission to September 2022 Public Inquiry on
Warrington Draft Local Plan

MATTER 3 – SPATIAL STRATEGY

Introduction and Summary

The Local Plan being examined by the Public Inquiry proposes a large increase in the contiguous built-up area of Warrington, including building on what is presently “Green Belt”.

This is detrimental for the following reasons:

- (a) Average journey lengths will increase by more than the number of new trips generated from a growing population. Increasing journey lengths increases the volume of traffic over and above the number of trips made.
- (b) This urban expansion is based on a 1960’s approach of low-density development primarily served by private cars. Such low densities are almost impossible to serve by public transport.
- (c) Even with an all-electric car fleet, well over a decade away, the level of pollution will increase, above an already unhealthy high level. In the meantime, longer car trips will mean increased fuel consumption and CO₂ releases.
- (d) For true sustainability, more planting of trees and shrubs will also be needed in both the “Green Belt” and in existing urban areas. This will enhance measures to reduce car trips from a denser and more compact urban area.

Discussion

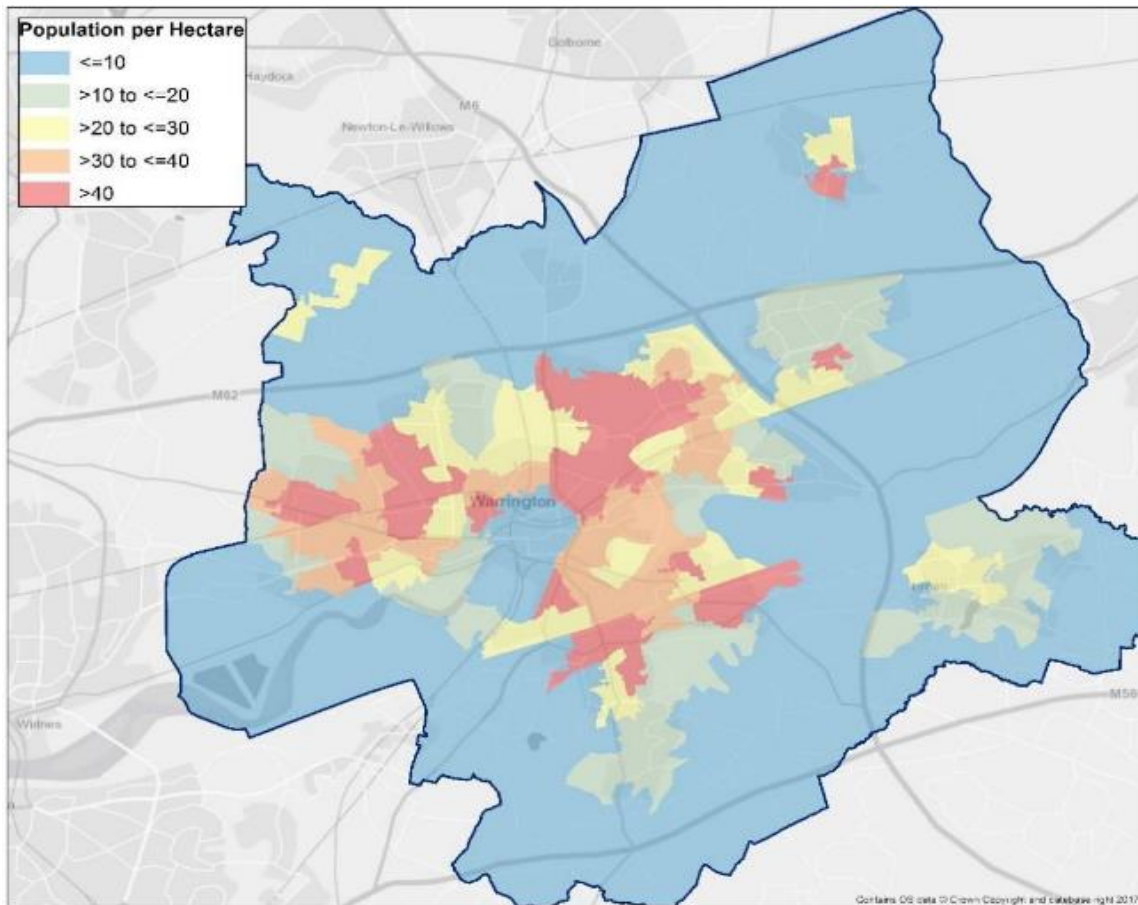
(a) Larger area = more traffic

Historically most of the increase in road traffic has been due to the increased number of private cars¹, and also the average length of journey, since the number of trips made per annum has stayed remarkably constant of the last 50 years. Warrington already has a high proportion of households with a car. This number is unlikely to change

¹ 81% of households with a car cv. UK 74% source: LTP4 Evidence base

dramatically in the next 20 years, but by expanding the size of the built up, the volume of traffic will increase.

Fig.1 Warrington present population density



Source: LTP Evidence Base 3.3

(b) Low density

As Fig. 1 above shows much of Warrington is already developed at a low density. The increase of traffic resulting from a larger urban area will be made worse by building at low density, reducing the average density of Warrington from the present figure of 45 persons per hectare, compared to nearly 50 per hectare in Chester City. Policy 2.3.1 proposes 24,000 new homes on the 'green belt'. At the existing density this means using 1270 hectares. In contrast Utrecht in the Netherlands with a similar

population has a population density of 56/hectare, set to grow by another 100,000 on a 1120-hectare site at a density of 89 per hectare.

Within Warrington's existing built-up area at Utrecht's present density, Warrington could accommodate 252,000 people. At Utrecht's expansion density, Warrington could house over 400,000 people but of course this could not be served by mostly cars trips, it will need an alternative mode that car users will accept. Again, the Netherlands can provide some examples of short trips made by bikes on safe bike paths, and longer trips and for those who cannot cycle, by tram.

(c) Larger area = more pollution

Motor vehicles are a major (37% in 2006)² cause of air pollution in Warrington, with levels of NOx, PM10, CO and other toxic exhausts above the maximum national level in the town centre and radial roads³, and well above that recommended by the WHO. Added to this motor vehicles also emit over a third of the CO₂, due increasing traffic and a reduction of greenhouse gases from other sources like industry, commerce and domestic.

Motor cars presently make up nearly 80% of Warrington traffic. Present government policy is a conversion of the vehicle fleet from internal combustion engines to electric propulsion. This however will need at least one generation to achieve. Meanwhile toxic air pollution levels will continue to rise, as will the emission of greenhouse gases. The increase in air pollution will increase the number of residents suffering from cardio-vascular diseases and the strain on NHS resources.

Fig.2 Warrington Population and traffic Graph

² LTP Evidence Base Policy 2.4.1

³ LTP Evidence Base Policy 2.4.3

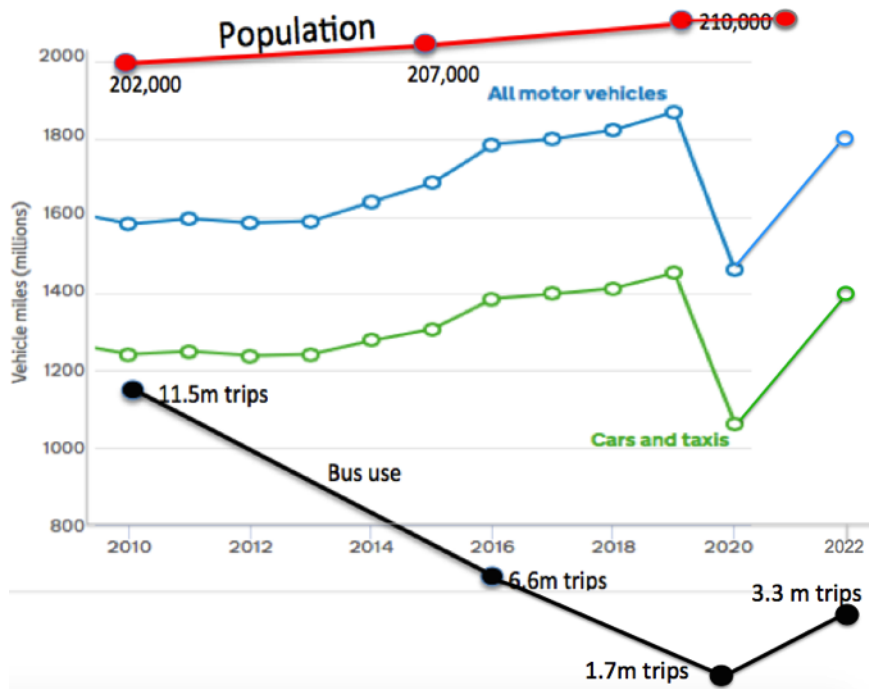


Fig. 2 shows the temporary dip in car use during the Coronavirus Crisis. Traffic levels are now nearly back to pre-pandemic levels. In contrast bus use was falling before the pandemic, fell further during the pandemic and have hardly recovered since, being less than 30% of the 2010 level, and are a minority mode of travel in Warrington. LTP 4 notes that “Taxis are becoming increasingly more competitive to local bus services”. Many US cities only have taxis as a mode of public transport. The grant of nearly £50million to replace some diesel buses with electric may change the perception of bus services and increase patronage and modal share. Data needs to be collected on this.

(d) Sustainability

Little or nothing of the above is sustainable. Eroding the greenbelt will reduce the ability to absorb CO₂ and other pollutants. Even if all the new buildings are ‘zero carbon’, which the latest Building Standards will not achieve, the increase in traffic will continue the increase levels of air pollution.

Ideally the developed area footprint should be reduced. This however is unlikely in the short term due to the youth and investment of the peripheral building stock. Nevertheless, new build could concentrate on increasing the density of the existing built up area, both by replacing some old buildings and adapting existing buildings for an increase in occupation density.

Added to this, to begin to reduce the impact of air pollution will need a mass planting of urban trees and other vegetation by widening footways and narrowing carriageways.