

Warrington Updated Proposed Submission (PSV) Local Plan Examination Hearing

Statement from David Thrower In Relation to Matter 3 (Spatial Strategy)

Matter 3 (Spatial Strategy)

1. The Plan in terms of the Spatial Strategy is not justified in National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) terms, because the Spatial Strategy is founded upon the passive option of relying largely on inherited 1960s (New Town Development Corporation/Homes England) land for housing expansion, rather than thoroughly and thoughtfully assessing the wider opportunities for a 2030s solution to meet present and likely future Government policy objectives.
2. The Plan in terms of the Spatial Strategy is also not justified in NPPF terms because it uses Green Belt land for a 1970s-style logistics park that should never, in the very different 2020s, have become a serious proposal.
3. The Plan, in terms of the Spatial Strategy, is also not consistent with national policy, again because it fails to sufficiently-develop innovative ideas for re-use of low-value industrial land within walking distance of the town centre for housing, and fails to identify land alongside the West Coast Main Line (and preferably alongside the Manchester Ship Canal, too) for an intermodal logistics terminal.
4. In more detail, the Plan's Spatial Strategy fails to recognise that South Warrington is intersected by three west-east waterways, with crossings that are limited in number, in some cases are limited by being single-file, in some cases are severely weight-limited, and in some cases are swing bridges interrupted daily by deep-sea maritime traffic. The Spatial Strategy should have recognised these severe topographical limitations from the outset in its selection of sites for new housing and employment.
5. In the Spatial Strategy, placing the emphasis of new housing in South and South-East Warrington fails to acknowledge that many trip-attractors (the town centre retailing facilities, the hospital, the major retailing complexes at Winwick Road and Gemini, the two mainline stations at Bank Quay and Central and the employment concentrations at the town centre, at Gemini, at Omega and at

Birchwood Science Park, are all north of the three interruptive waterways. The Spatial Strategy is thus fundamentally flawed.

6. The Spatial Strategy also fails to identify and exploit the potential opportunity (not mentioned in the Plan) for new housing on land alongside the A5080 Farnworth Road immediately south of the Liverpool-Warrington Central-Manchester rail line, where a new housing estate alongside a potential new rail station, Barrow's Green, could be provided.

7. This area is acknowledged to regrettably be Green Belt, but a commensurate reduction in Green Belt development in South Warrington would balance this out, neutralising the overall impact. The location is part-covered by a Mineral Safeguarding Area designation (sub-alluvial river terrace deposits) but this should prove to be only a marginal factor in any overall assessment of costs and benefits. It is suggested that 1,200 houses could be located in this area, with a further 500 to follow beyond the Plan Period.

8. The Spatial Strategy also fails as noted to fully-exploit the opportunity to relocate certain low-value non-residential activities further away from the town centre to make way for new housing. In particular, these could include relocation of retailing of heavy non-food items such as building materials, together with removal and re-use of their associated parking areas and other roadspace. It could also include relocation of car-related activities such as car showrooms and car repair facilities, which do not need to be very close to the town centre.

9. As part of the Spatial Strategy, the released land could then be rapidly redeveloped as high-density housing and flats, whose occupants could then exploit the ten-minutes walking-distance proximity of the town centre for employment, shopping, dining and entertainment, as well as the close availability of both mainline rail stations and the bus interchange. The Spatial Strategy could incorporate a target of 5,000 additional new homes in the town centre and the surrounding ten-minute walk-in catchment, on such released land.

10. The Spatial Strategy has also fails to identify the opportunity to develop significant housing south of Birchwood rail station and Birchwood Centre. The area immediately south of Birchwood station is justifiably protected as a Peat Reserve, but further south there is a significant area of land to the east of the M6 and north of the A57 that could be connected to the station, Birchwood Centre and Birchwood Science Park if a 2km single-carriageway link road was built

between a necessary new bridge over the railway immediately east of Birchwood station and the A57 to the south. It is suggested that 500 new homes could be located here, conveniently-close to shopping and employment and an established modern rail station with fast trains to Warrington centre, Liverpool and Manchester.

11. Overall, it is suggested that within the Spatial Strategy, and in recognition of these locations' mostly-superior transport links, the proposed totals for new housing at other outlying locations could also be (mostly) marginally adjusted upwards, or in the case of South Warrington reduced very significantly downwards in view of the latter area's transport constraints.

12. The Spatial Strategy therefore would benefit from a fundamental re-working to better-accommodate both housing needs and transport-infrastructure limitations, and to more closely align with current and likely future Government policies in an era where Green Belt land is likely to be needed for domestic agriculture, where it will be desirable for as many people as possible to be able to be within walking distance of the town centre, and where reducing congestion and (particularly) emissions are becoming a very high priority.