

**Trams for Warrington
Respondent Number 0395**

Submission to September 2022 Public Inquiry on
Warrington Draft Local Plan

MATTER 4 – Housing need and housing requirement

Introduction and Summary

There is no argument that more dwellings will be needed due to:

- (a) (i) Growing population, as Warrington attracts more residents.
- (ii) Average household size is declining

What is open to dispute is that this increase should be met predominately by 'semi-detached or similar housing in low-density estates, difficult or impossible to serve by public transport (except taxis).

- (b) The rise in the cost of housing means fewer people will be able to own their own homes. More rented and affordable social accommodation will therefore be needed.
- (c) Further, even with an influx of younger people, there is a growing proportion of elderly people, many of whom will need adapted dwellings or long-term care.
- (d) The plan hardly looks at alternative housing types, and very little on increasing housing density to:
 - (i) accommodate different dwelling types
 - (ii) reduce the land needed to provide more dwellings
 - (iii) Reuse and intensify the use of existing buildings and 'brown field' sites.
 - (iv) Reduce the need to own a private car
 - (v) Enable more residents to be within walking distance of an acceptable public (transport) service, and other local services (the '15minute aim'¹)

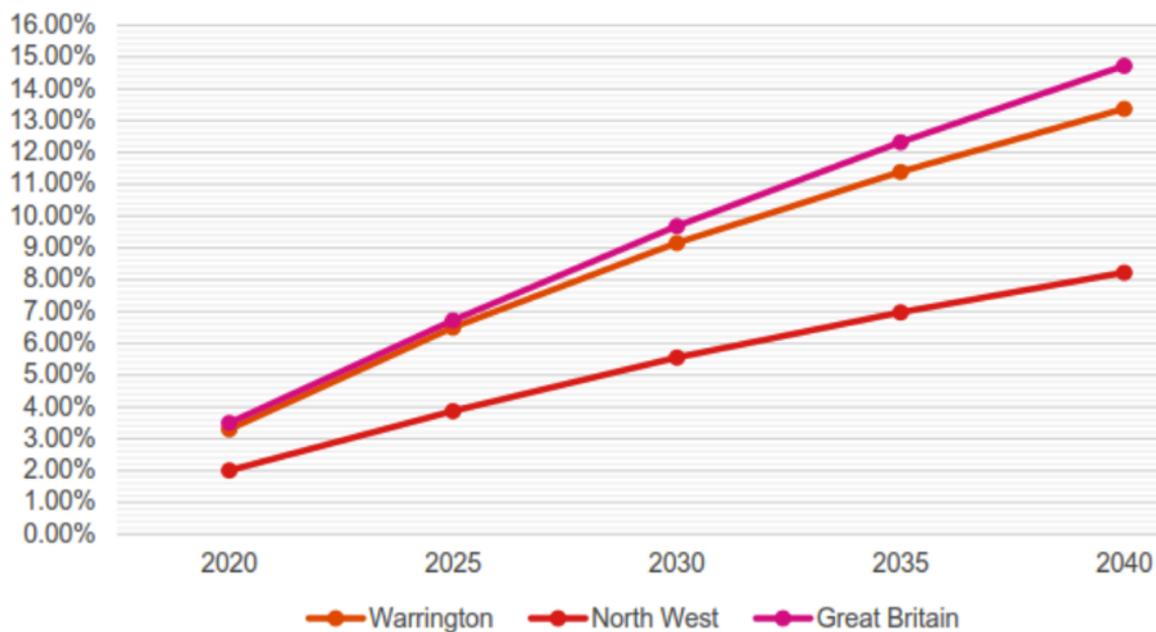
Discussion

- (a) Need for more dwellings

¹ <https://www.15minutecity.com/>

The population of Warrington has been growing for some time as Fig. 2 shows. In the absence of alternative policies this growth will continue, with new dwellers either being employed in Warrington or out commuting to Manchester, and a lesser extent Liverpool.

Fig.3 Projected increase in population

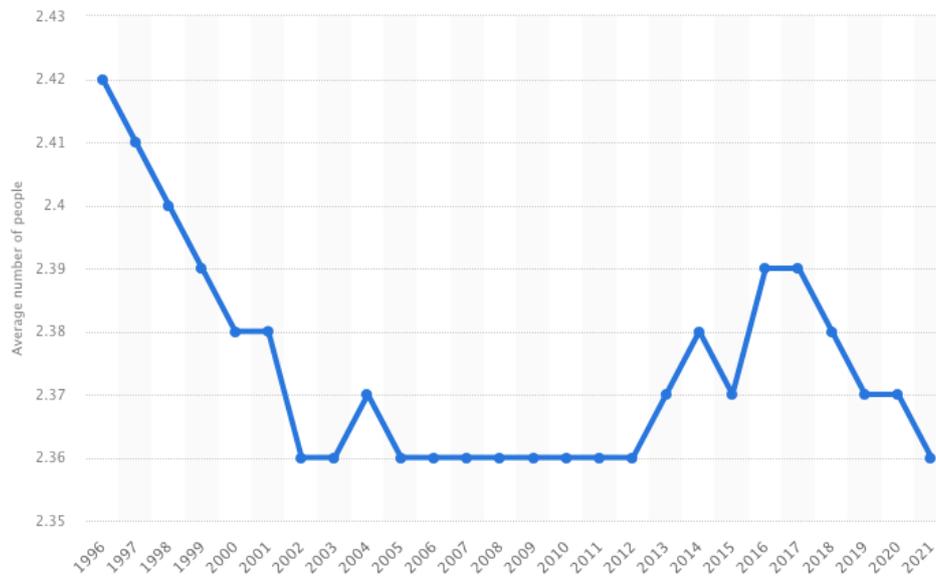


Source: LTP Evidence Base Policy 3.3.2 Fig. 3

Figure 3 shows the population growing by nearly 10% by 2040, about 0.5% pa. or over 1000 pa. This will need about 500 additional housing units at present average household size (Fig. 4) , covering 23hectares at Warrington present population density, falling to 20 hectares at Utrecht’s existing density or only 12 at the planned expansion of Utrecht.

Even if more residents were not attracted to Warrington, more dwellings would still be needed due to the decline in the average size of households

Fig. 4 Average household size



Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/295551/average-household-size-in-the-uk/>

This graph shows a decline in size of household size over the last ten years, a decline that has been in train for over 50 years.

It is clear that the additional dwellings will need to be a variety of housing types and locations to cater for different household sizes and different stages of life.

(b) Rented accommodation

For years to come as house prices continue to increase and be more than 10 times annual income, many people will be forced to rent. This particularly applies to families on low incomes and young people leaving home. Pensioners owning their own homes can downsize and still be able to afford a new suitable dwelling. Young people on the other hand starting their career will need to be more flexible.

“Strong Towns” shows such youngsters are willing to live in spaces above town centre commercial units, much of which in Warrington is presently under used. The Government has various schemes to bring such vacant spaces into economic use. Manchester demonstrates that this trend of central living for young people stimulates a range of other activities, as “Strong Towns” demonstrates, bringing back into use land, which might otherwise will become derelict. A lot of the Manchester Central area regeneration was stimulated and enabled by Metrolink trams.

(c) Accommodating the elderly

Even if there is an influx of young people for further and higher education or work willing to live in town centre accommodation 'above the shop', the proportion of pensioners (about 25%)² in the population is growing. Many of these are active and take care of themselves but a significant number are frail and need care in a protected environment. Locating such accommodation needs careful planning, so that family members can visit regularly, important for the good mental health of older people. Ironically such care homes near schools can have a synergetic benefit.

(d) Alternative dwelling types

The Warrington already has some variety in its housing stock. Given the discussion above this needs to be widened further firstly to enable an increase in density, so better use is made of the existing urban area. Increasing density from Warrington's present level of 47people/hectare to the Utrecht level of 56, would enable an increase of 40,000 people without needing to build on any "green belt' land. It would also improve the value added of the existing building stock.

Warrington already has a lot of underused and empty buildings and some 'brown field' land that should have first priority for new dwellings. As the Royal Institute of British Architects has shown it is less financially costly and has a much smaller carbon footprint to adapt existing buildings, than demolish and rebuild³.

² LTP Evidence Base Policy 3.3.1

³ "Building a better Britain" RIBA 2014

Fig. 5 Bridge Street stress



Fig.6 Abandoned buildings in Warrington



In terms of sustainability, the money and energy inputs to maintain and use housing over its lifetime is several orders of magnitude greater than the energy and material cost of building, adapting or refurbishing buildings. So new housing must from the start be net zero energy by means of enhanced insulation and the use of solar panels for heating and electricity generation.

Further minimising the energy needed to reach and service new houses must be directed to reducing dependency on private car use, by means of higher densities and making the provision of acceptable alternatives like cycling and public transport (e.g. trams) practical.

Being accessible on foot not just to acceptable public transport but also local services, like shops, schools, post office, GP surgery etc. will greatly improve the liveability of an area, and help to maintain the financial viability of such services. Such small catchment areas means that neighbours will meet and social contacts built. This also helps community cohesion. The 15 minute target⁴ should be the basis for any new development.

⁴ <https://www.15minutecity.com/>