

**Trams for Warrington
Respondent Number 0395**

Submission to September 2022 Public Inquiry on
Warrington Draft Local Plan

MATTER 5 – Economic Growth and Development

Introduction and Summary

Economic growth is dependent on increasing value -added activities and reducing wasted expenditure. The “Strong Towns” movement¹ has shown after considerable analysis that:

- (a) town centres have the greatest potential and actual value-added activity.
- (b) increasing public investment in infrastructure reduces the local value added, due to the need for increased maintenance, reducing funds for social and similar local needs.
- (c) Low density private car orientated development performs much worse than traditional urban layouts like terraced or mews housing.
- (d) Adapting existing buildings retains and creates more wealth than demolition and rebuilding, and costs less.
- (e) Initiatives created by groups of local people are more durable.
- (f) Encouraging social interaction improves community cohesion and leads to more local wealth creation.
- (g) In any town the volume of private investment (and spending) is an order of magnitude greater than public spending typically 4 to 1).
- (h) Encouraging and harnessing private spending in the local area will have a much bigger impact than ‘parachuted-in’ public sector projects.
- (i) Focussing investment in the central area has a magnetic attraction for both the enhancement of the centre and attracting value added from outside the centre, and especially private investment.

Discussion

¹ <https://www.strongtowns.org>

(a) Role of Town Centre

Warrington Town Centre has been struggling economically for a while, as have other town centres, due to changing shopping habits and the closure of established multi-branch shops. In practice in terms of the value added per unit area, the town centre will still be the most important part of the town. This role can be enhanced in two ways:

- (j) increasing the resident population will mean that more spending will be retained in the centre, increasing its turnover and economic attractiveness.
- (ii) improving the accessibility of the centre especially by non-car travel. This can be achieved by the use of acceptable public transport alternatives (eg bikes and trams) linked to park and ride at the periphery, which will also capture external trips. Further reducing the centre's dependency on car trips, both for work and other activities, reduces the need for car parking, which is value reducing use of land. Such land can be converted to value added use, thus further strengthening the role of the town centre.

Fig.7 Cycling access in Netherlands



Fig.8 Central area tram and bike access, and pedestrianisation



(b) Public Infrastructure Investment

With Warrington Council's finances in a difficult position, and with an accumulated debt of about £1.5bn there is little chance of any major public investment in infrastructure. Even if there were funds available "Strong Towns" analysis shows this is often value detracting, despite the most positive cost benefit analysis results, since the claimed benefits are mostly non-financial, and the new infrastructure will require long term maintenance, reducing the funds available for maintaining pre-existing infrastructure, hence the proliferation of "pot holes" and other matters needing maintenance.

Further there is also the lost 'opportunity cost' of limited funds for capital projects, especially as the Byzantine nature of public finance is that maintenance comes out of the revenue budget, for which there is never a long-term guarantee. So often new investments will deteriorate for lack of adequate maintenance, and then need to be refurbished with another capital investment, again without maintenance funding.

(c) Development to strengthen value added

In the last 50 years most new development has been based on the 'Radburn' principle of indirect routes, low density and ease of access by cars, and the separation of pedestrians. The analysis undertaken by

“Strong Towns” shows that more value is added, as well as other community benefits from traditional streets with terrace housing (Fig. 9) or development.

Further Mews developments (Fig. 10) are even better since each is a micro community, with space available for children to play safely and the buildings/dwellings being more flexible in use, including setting up small businesses, which have the capacity to grow into larger ones. Such developments are normally at a higher but acceptable density for residents.

Fig.9 Modern Terrace housing



Fig.10 Modern Mews housing Hambridge



(d) Retain and refurbish, not demolish and rebuild

It has been established for many years adapting existing buildings for new uses, including upgrading (Fig. 11) to meet modern standards is both financially less costly and significantly reduces carbon emissions². Since sustainability is both a financial and ecological matter, and the UK must reduce its CO₂ footprint to help curb global warming, this is a matter of considerable importance for the Local Plan. This is especially true if 'comprehensive redevelopment' is being considered. This create "blight" (Fig. 12) deterring neighbouring property owners from maintaining and improving their assets, since such large schemes can often take a decade or more to assemble and complete.

Fig.11 Modernised Victoria Terrace



Fig.12 Urban blight – a curable disease

² "Building a better Britain" RIBA 2014



Historically towns have incrementally changed and improved. This slow 'bottom up' approach also increases value added by reducing waste. Small changes are less disruptive and more easily adapted to changing economic and social circumstances than 'mega' comprehensive redevelopment. It also leads to less wasted investment, since small schemes can be funded by individuals or small companies, not needing public subsidy. This also means that the role of the Council will be to encourage and enable.

(e) Local group initiatives

Groups of local people, whether secular or sacred can together bring about economic change and advancing social cohesion. Too often in the past such initiatives have been discouraged or even thwarted by political actions, leading to a disengagement from community matters. Local people taking control of projects are likely to be durable, since these will be 'owned' and so valued for the achievement of the project.

(f) Social cohesion and wealth creation

Local people working together are more likely to generate economic activity that will help with local wealth creation. Community cohesion engenders community spirit. Projects generated by local groups will almost certainly address local needs. Such needs may not be high on the agenda of the Council, or not meet spending criteria. Worse still will

be a local project which the Council may view as 'competitive' with one of their own pet projects. Such pet projects have often in the past failed to mobilise local communities, or worse still mobilise them negatively with anti-social behaviour and vandalism and political opposition.

(g) Public v private investment and spending

In a mixed economy like Warrington the funds available for private spending are at least an order of magnitude greater than those available to the Council. The Council should therefore welcome private investment (Fig 13) and spending since this can provide facilities that the public sector may never be able to afford.

Fig.13 Junction Nine Retail Park waiting for tenants



Part of this dichotomy is the debate about public services. This of course depends on the definition of a public service. Is this a service that provided by the public sector, or a service provided for the public? The classic is of course access to food, which historically has been a private sector activity, and provided in a competitive and commercial environment. The profit motive as well as market share are two major drivers here. Competition ensures that profits are reasonable and not exploitive. In societies where food distribution is a public sector monopoly, shortages, scarcity and rationing are commonplace.

When the public sector is both provider and regulator, often the regulation may be short circuited. On the otherhand if the private sector is the provider, then the public sector can properly fulfil its duty to protect public welfare, by enforcing regulations.

An example of this is the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 which set a deadline for public transport to become accessible. Bus services, mostly

operated by private companies achieved this some time ago. In contrast accessibility to the railway network is still years away.

(h) Encouraging private spending.

From the discussion in (g) above the private sector is likely to have more resources available than the public. So the Council should be implementing policies to retain private spending in Warrington and attract new investment into the town. Warrington is unlikely to become a tourist centre like Chester, Manchester or Liverpool. Warrington could become an attraction for leisure activities, an example of which is Gulliver's world. Similarly a rejuvenated town centre could become an attractor for a special evening meal?

(i) Central area magnet ?

As Christaller showed in the 1930's³, central places attract and retain the largest proportion of economic activity per unit area. Creating a new 'centre' dilutes the strength of the existing centre, and can mean that both may fail since there may not enough spending power to support two centres. The Council through its Local Plan should recognise this and focus both its own limited investment and maximise the attraction of private investments to the existing centre. This can be by means of minimal interventions to upgrade existing facilities, like arcades (Fig. 14)

Fig.14 Strengthening town centre small input large benefit

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_place_theory



The centre may already have a critical mass. If not, then policies should strengthen this role so that the town centre becomes the natural location of new 'central place' investments. One of the ways to strengthen the town centre is through a public transport system that will attract trips from cars, on the basis of saving the need to face congestion and the problem and cost of parking. This has been a key to the regeneration of urban areas in France and Germany (Appendix) where trams have been instrumental in central area rejuvenation.

Finally economic growth will be more difficult if the people of Warrington have no belief in the future. The Council and Councillors as civic leaders have a duty to promote the future and attract investment.

Appendix

Table French and Germany towns with similar populations to Warrington having trams

Name of Town	Population (thousands)
France	
Montpellier	278
Strasbourg	277
Bordeaux	250

Lille	233
Reims	180
Le Havre	172
St. Etienne	171
Grenoble	161
Dijon	155
Angers	152
Le Mans	143
Clermont Ferrand	141
Brest	139
Tours	136
Amiens	133
Caen	106

Germany	
Ausburg	286
Wiesbaden	276
Gelsenkirchen	260
Monchengladbach	260
Braunschweig	251
Magdeburg	236
Freiburg	226
Krefeld	225
Lubeck	216
Oberhausen	211
Efurt	210
Mainz	210
Rostock	206
Kassel	198
Saarbruken	178
Mulheim	169
Potsdam	168
Ludwigshafen	165
Leverkusen	163
Solingen	159
Heidelberg	156
Herne	156
Darmstadt	155
Ingolstadt	132
Wurzburg	125
Furth	124
Wolfsburg	124

Offenbach	124
Ulm	123
Heilbronn	123
Bottrop	117
Recklinghausen	114
Bremerhaven	114
Koblenz	113