

Warrington Updated Proposed Submission (PSV) Local Plan Examination Hearing

Statement from David Thrower In Relation to Matter 6b (Main Development Area, South East Warrington Urban Extension)

Matter 6b (South East Warrington Urban Extension)

1. The Plan in relation to the South East Warrington Urban Extension does not meet the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) criteria of being positively prepared because it fails to sufficiently recognise and address the highly-likely adverse transport effects that would be a consequence of such a scale of development in such a location. The detail of these transport consequences are dealt with in my Statement on Matter 11.
2. The Plan is not justified in NPPF terms because it takes the passive option of locating development on mostly-inherited (New Town Development Corporation/Homes England) land, rather than re-appraising the likely adverse consequences of that action and seeking a better solution to accommodate desirable local economic growth and meeting very real housing need.
3. The Plan in relation to the Urban Extension is not effective because it seeks to rely upon vague possibilities of new residents using active travel modes (walking and cycling), and a possible Mass Transit system, when there is no practical means of securing behavioural change to achieve the former or funds to implement the latter. In effect, it “solves” the need for housing whilst simultaneously creating additional transport problems (which will be dealt with under Matter 11) that are likely to prove intractable.
4. The Plan in relation to the Urban Extension is not consistent with national policy, because it fails to sufficiently-exploit the very considerable opportunities for creating new medium-density and high-density housing in the town centre and the surrounding ten-minute-walk “polo mint” area, where unsuitable or irrelevant (to the town centre) commercial activities could be progressively relocated to create housing space. It then takes the easy option of spreading low-density housing estates over arable farmland. It is not a Government policy

to build low-density housing over farmland as a first option. The South East Warrington Urban Extension, both in terms of land use and transport implications, represents the implementation of a 1970s plan when Government policy is set in the 2020s and is focussed on, amongst other objectives, Net Zero for 2050.

5. As has been pointed out in my evidence and my statement in relation to the Spatial Strategy, the Plan's proposals for a massive South East Warrington Urban Extension are a consequence of the failure of the Council to undertake a sufficiently fundamental review of the opportunities and problems in meeting housing (and other) needs whilst taking sufficient account of the topographical features of South Warrington (three west-east waterways with very limited crossing-points) and other relevant factors.

6. Again as pointed out in my statement on the Spatial Strategy, I believe that there is sufficient scope - albeit involving changes to the Plan that will not be universally popular with residents in affected areas - for housing targets to be met through the exploitation of other opportunities elsewhere in the Borough for new housing. This would be based upon the principles of (1) identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the transport network (a network that is extremely difficult and costly to alter), then (2) identifying potentially-affordable and fundable improvements to it, to increase capacity and resilience, and then (3) locating new housing on or close to those upgraded transport corridors.

7. The above approach would then dramatically reduce the need to establish large areas of new housing on arable land in South East Warrington. Instead of 2,400 new homes with a further 1,800 new homes for South East Warrington, a suggested more reasonable total would be 500 new homes with a possible further 500 new homes beyond the Plan period. Even this would be likely to aggravate existing transport problems further.