

Warrington Updated Proposed Submission (PSV) Local Plan Examination Hearing

Statement from David Thrower In Relation to Matter 6c (Main Development Area, Fiddlers Ferry)

Matter 6c (Fiddlers Ferry)

1. The proposal in the Plan to redevelop the former Fiddlers Ferry Power Station site for housing is a very welcome initiative. The purpose of my statement is to make a minor suggestion in relation to the site, and a more significant suggestion in relation to land immediately adjacent to it.

2. The current proposal in the Plan is for 1,300 new homes at Fiddlers Ferry, with a further 500 beyond the Plan Period. It is suggested that this is marginally modified to 1,500 new homes during the Plan period and commensurately reduced to 300 beyond the Plan period, to accelerate provision. A larger number of homes earlier would be more likely to help to support a viable bus service to Warrington and Widnes. It would also assist the possible provision of a new rail station should the currently freight-only rail route through the area be re-opened as part of Northern Powerhouse Rail and provided with a local stopping passenger service between Liverpool and Warrington via this line.

3. Although it does not form part of the Fiddlers Ferry brownfield site, there is a major opportunity to locate significant additional new housing immediately north of the site, in the area of farmland that lies between the A562 Widnes Road and the A5080 Farnworth Road, and possibly north of the A5080 too, and including the provision of a new rail station, Barrow's Green, at the intersection of the A5080 and the current Liverpool-Warrington Central-Manchester passenger rail route. A new station at this site would give very rapid access (under 10 minutes) to the centre of Warrington, and ready access to Liverpool and to Manchester.

4. It has been suggested as part of my statement on the Spatial Strategy that a total of 1,200 homes could be provided as part of the Plan, with a further 500 beyond the Plan period. It is acknowledged that the area is designated Green Belt, but development here could obviate the need to build on Green Belt in South Warrington, thus producing a neutral overall effect in terms of loss of Green Belt. The differences between building new homes in South Warrington

and building new homes (additional to those proposed for Fiddlers Ferry) between the A562 and the A5080 are that (1) the latter could be potentially served by rail whereas the former certainly could not, and (2) the Fiddlers Ferry area and the area immediately north of it could be linked to Warrington centre throughout with dual carriageway (almost all of which is already in place), whereas new housing in South Warrington could only be linked to the town centre via the already-congested locations of Stockton Heath and Latchford, both of which also include swing bridges that open at unpredictable times.

5. The direct relevance of this suggested course of action to the Fiddlers Ferry site is that a new station at Barrow's Green would (at just over half a mile from the A562) also be potentially within ready cycling and walking distance of the Plan's proposed new housing at Fiddlers Ferry, and could be provided and funded as an integral part of both the proposed new housing at Fiddlers Ferry and the suggested new housing between the A562 and the A5080. This would, provided a new station was built at Barrow's Green, offer a rail link to Warrington, Liverpool and Manchester via an existing rail service, rather than being dependent (1) on Northern Powerhouse Rail being built via Fiddlers Ferry, (2) a stopping-train service being provided on the route (there is absolutely no plan to do this at present) and (3) a new station being built at Fiddlers Ferry.

6. Construction of a new station, one platform of which would be in Warrington and one in Halton as the boundary is by the rail bridge, would depend upon finance being available. However, it is far more likely that a station could be viably supported (in terms of patronage) by the 3,500 houses of the Fiddlers Ferry plus A562-A5080 sites combined than just the 1,800 of the Fiddlers Ferry housing. A new station could also be conveniently used by Halton residents to the west, further underpinning its viability.

7. It is acknowledged that construction of 1,500 plus 300 new houses at Fiddlers Ferry plus the suggested 1,200 plus 500 new houses at the A562-A5080 site would produce a semi-continuous urban area between Warrington and Widnes. However, it is suggested that this is a theoretical rather than a practical drawback. There are plenty of examples of continuous urbanisation such as Huyton-Prescot-St Helens, or Sale-Altrincham-Hale, where quality of life does not seem to be significantly diminished by the lack of a dividing rural gulf.