

STATEMENT FROM Cllr CAROL BENSON RE CULCHETH - Matter 7b LOCAL PLAN

I wish to raise issues with the Plan submitted for Culcheth alongside 0740/2374 objections (already submitted by me during consultation) for the following reasons

1. The area identified is in the Green Belt and legal requirements have not been followed
 - a. WBC have not shown exceptional circumstances for taking this green belt and wrongly claim it is WEAK greenbelt.
 - b. The area is occupied by a farm near by and mainly large agricultural fields. These are fertile and growing crops as they have for hundreds of years. The country needs and the residents want to grow our own crops.
 - c. WBC have not looked at alternatives to this site.
 - d. This site is not adjacent nor joins homes to the North nor any side with exception of the Cattery on corner of Holcroft Lane and Warrington Road. The car park of this cattery appears to be included for development as a separate item but is also, and similarly, not appropriate for houses.
 - e. WBC claim development on this site does not represent unrestricted sprawl. Of course, it does – it more than halves the Greenbelt between Culcheth and Glazebury (the next village). The greenbelt here currently does form a function to separate the settlements of Glazebury and Culcheth.
 - f. WBC fail to recognise Glazebury as the adjacent village and refer to Leigh which is just beyond Glazebury.
 - g. They say site is not next to a historic town. Culcheth is first mentioned in survey of 1212. There are many historic buildings and buildings of interest. Glazebury is also steeped in history. Lots of buildings from hundreds of years ago. Oliver Cromwell, Thomas Blood are linked with both villages. Several hidden tunnels and Chat Moss is a well know local place in many history books. Stevenson's Rocket on first railway and many more places of historical interest.
 - h. No green belt needs to be taken for more than 15 years anywhere in Warrington given the amount of brownfield sites available.
 - i. Government have repeated they expect Councils to use Brown field before green belt which should only be taken in exceptional circumstances. WBC are not following these directives. They say Culcheth will be one of first to start building in 2023. There are smaller brown field sites in Culcheth which have been left in preference to this prime agricultural green belt.
 - j. It would appear that little thought has gone into the planning before deciding Culcheth green belt is "weak". A quick look through all the areas will reveal they have tended to use the same arguments for most sites. Each site is different and has its own individuality.
 - k. They refer to not crossing view of Parish church – Newchurch Parish Church is in adjacent field a few hundred yards away.

2. Decision to select this specific site is unsound.
 - a. The site is planned to be built on first/early 2023 which is in conflict of rules to use other sites such as Brown field first.

- b. There have been many infill builds during the time this plan has been produced meaning Culcheth and next village of Glazebury have contributed to most if not all of the proposed number of new dwellings already, so numbers claimed to be needed are no longer correct.
- c. The latest Census shows a reduction in the residents for Warrington generally and Culcheth too so again supports the lowering of numbers needed.
- d. WBC claim developer approves the location – That cannot be taken as proof of suitability for taking Greenbelt.
- e. No modification to these numbers since the 2017 & 2019 plans produced which failed to get approval. Why do they think it should now?
- f. The sewer network is over committed as stated by UU and the waste treatment plant often struggles to cope. These planned houses would add to that problem significantly.
- g. The Plan appears to say 200+ houses for Culcheth **but there is also a further section of these same fields WBC say will become “isolated green belt” so they intend to take that area too. See pg 18 of green belt allocation.**
- h. Story Homes the proposed builder say, in their reports/plans, they may build up to 500 houses in Culcheth so they know of the “extra” fields.
- i. Culcheth has many combined sewers for surface water and sewage which are a legacy from many years ago when the population was much smaller. These sewers cannot cope now with even average rainfall so will not cope with this extra burden of new homes. There is often back pressure which forces sewage up gully drains and the rest of the surface water system, causing serious issues for many residents.
- j. Culcheth was traditionally a farming community and many areas have ditches and culverts. The planned area has a major open culvert running across the site from Shaw Street to Holcroft Lane. This Leet or Culvert was and still is used to ease the pressure on the surrounding waste water system. It is quite deep and wide so can take large volumes of water in heavy rain. Even with that we still get flooding on adjacent Shaw Street and nearby Mee Brow, Fowley Common and all along Warrington Road in this area. The fields act as a soak away for some of this water.
- k. When this point was raised, I was told the plan is to build large tanks under the new houses to take the excess sewage and waste water the system cannot cope with and discharge it at a later more suitable time. This is very doubtful given the amount of local flooding we already have in this area on a regular basis.
- l. **A very important point with regard to tankage. The site has a major high-pressure gas main of 1.3 mtr diameter running from the North down through the middle of the whole site and on to Rixton area. There is also a high voltage electricity installation running in the same direction across the same fields.**
How will they fit tanks with this?
- m. The roads through Culcheth already are overloaded and are regularly gridlocked - more cars would be intolerable. Holcroft Lane is a busy road and has had several bad accidents so adding further traffic and a further road junction will add to risk of more fatalities on this road.
- n. WBC claim there are resources to support the proposed development. This is incorrect. The few food shops we have are not enough for the village as it is now. The three banks all closed. The medical centre is struggling to cope every

day and many people do not get appointments at all never mind when needed. The schools are full and police struggle to cope with the volume of ASB we already have. WBC saw fit to close the Gym and remove all support for any sports facilities in Culcheth.

- o. Bringing even 200 more houses into Culcheth would be a disaster. The cost of these houses even if they are “affordable” would not be afforded by local first-time buyers. The plans are far more likely to attract new residents from out of the area which will add to the problems already in existence and not solve any perceived shortage of homes.

3. WBC have failed their duty to co-operate

- a. WBC said they would undertake a full and comprehensive program of consultation. This was very poor, only one venue for the exhibition of the plan for all of Warrington (Halliwell Jones Stadium) Town centre of Warrington. The entrance for the consultation was round the back of the stadium and was difficult to find (even for the determined). The exhibition was closed very early on 20th October when the Consultation wasn't due to end until 15th November.
- b. Many local residents do not drive or have access to nor can use a computer. They have been left without any information from WBC so many are unaware of the local plan.
- c. Local Parish Councils were told they could collect information from WBC to display in libraries or Parish Halls. There was much confusion on where and when these items could be available to be collected. The onus was put onto the Parish Councillors to arrange everything. Staff were uninformed of what was needed. Very little notice and very little thought given. One of our elderly Councillors had to drive into Warrington to collect the posters. We shared one of our paper plans with the library as there was a restriction on numbers of copies available. Again, only those able to visit the library and if they were aware of the consultation would be able to see this display. Many, if not most residents remained unaware of any plans. When they are told by Councillors they are shocked and very concerned.
- d. The WBC website which was supposed to have information for residents to look at re the Local plan failed to work initially. Neither Councillors nor residents could get onto the website so were unable to object formally at that time.
- e. The Borough Council meeting held to discuss and approve the local plan was badly planned. Papers were only sent out a week before the meeting with well over 700 pages for Councillors to read and all the supporting evidence referenced within that needed to be looked up. It was felt and stated by opposition Councillors that insufficient time had been given for studying the information before the meeting.
- f. The whole consultation appeared rushed through with little thought or care to how everyone would be notified.
- g. They did not send a letter to each house which was raised at the time, but they chose to put an article in the Warrington Guardian instead. That would not be seen by the vast majority of residents.
- h. Many of our residents sadly are still unaware of the plans.

This statement indicates some of the issues with the Local Plan for Culcheth. Cllr Benson wishes to speak at the hearing as requested and will bring supporting papers and answer questions to assist with the Inspection of WBC Local Plan.

I believe these plans for both Culcheth and Croft are not legally compliant, or sound, nor do they comply with the duty to co-operate with regard to informing those residents affected by the plans and getting their responses. The low level of responses back up these beliefs/comments and also the large number of residents who remain unaware.

Cllr Carol Benson – Culcheth Glazebury and Croft.