

Warrington Tram

Further Comments for Local Plan Hearing
From Prof. Lewis Lesley

Introduction

These comments are additional to the earlier paper which centred on

- (a) Spatial strategy
- (b) Housing need
- (c) Economic growth.

These comments are specifically related to the additional submission by Warrington Borough Council ref. CD09, which outlines the cost of the proposed Western Link Road and how the Council expects to fund it.

These comments are both as a result of listening to the evidence presented by a number of parties at the Local Plan Hearing and reflecting further on the content of the Draft Plan. Local MP Andrew Carter clearly stated that additional funding needed to complete the Western Link Road might not be forthcoming from the DfT. This road if built would only benefit a small part of Warrington, and specifically the Developers who hope to build new homes in the Green Belt.

My earlier submission showed that such public expenditure would be value subtracting, based on the wide analysis of “Strong Towns”. The earlier evidence from Messrs Buttress, Harkins and Thrower showed that:

- (i) The link road would worsen the already high levels of toxic air pollution
- (ii) A tramway serving the whole of Warrington could be built for a similar cost and be largely self funding, as well as attracting some existing car trips and therefore reduce the level of traffic congestion and air pollution.

It seems that the political leadership of Warrington Borough Council has not been fully engaged in the framing of this draft, which could easily have been prepared in the 1960's, as it hardly reflects the urgent priorities of the 2020's, including the need to phase out the use of fossil fuels and legally reach carbon dioxide zero by 2050. This is the UK contribution to the global effort to reduce climate warming and the environmental consequences of that. Nor does the draft attempt to implement sustainability either in proposed new development, or in refurbishing the existing built up area.

Added to this the Council may have a conflict of interest relating to a tramway, as the owner of the Warrington Bus service, which my earlier evidence showed is losing market share. The salutary lesson of the neighbouring Halton Council's bus service should not be forgotten. Trams and buses in other places do work together in an integrated network, which with co-operation and imagination could be achieved in Warrington, therefore helping towards both climate change Carbon

Dioxide reductions and lessening the health damaging levels of toxic air pollution. Presently Warrington has a USA level of car usage, which for a sustainable future needs to be significantly reduced. A public transport system that is acceptable to many car users will achieve that.

Given that the impact of the Local Plan is likely to last at least 100 years, and that the Draft has already been through iterations in 2017, 2019 and 2021, a delay while these short-comings are addressed and accommodated will ensure that future generations are not left with intractable problems, that could and should be avoided today.

Zero Carbon

It is a legal requirement that the UK be Zero carbon dioxide by 2050. Some major settlements are targeting an earlier achievement for their area. On the basis of the draft plan, it will never be reached in Warrington. This is an irresponsible position. Apart from the legal duty we have a responsibility to our great grand children to allow them to inherit a place that is not making global warming worse. On present trends, sea levels will rise by up to 1 metre. This will mean high tide flooding in Warrington and the overtopping of the Ship Canal.

Steps needed in the Local Plan include the requirement that all new buildings be zero carbon, since buildings are the biggest consumers of fossil fuels and emitters of CO₂ (c60%) . This is technically and practically achievable by means of better insulation, the installation of solar panels, heat pumps and other energy saving devices. Whilst this will have an initial capital cost impact, the whole life costs will be significantly less than would otherwise be the case, providing funds for other economic activities, including adding value in Warrington.

Planning applications for existing buildings should approve refurbishment, including the requirement to retrofit zero carbon interventions. This over the plan period (30years) will be a significant step towards achieving zero carbon in Warrington.

The other large emitter of CO₂ is transport. Warrington is already at US level of car ownership and usage. Until the vehicle fleet is fully converted to zero carbon engines, the proposed expansion of the physical size of the built up area will lengthen journey lengths and increase the emission of CO₂.

Sustainability

Reducing CO₂ emissions to zero is part of achieving sustainability. Other parts including constraining the physical size of Warrington to retain farmland for food production and so reduce reliance on imports, increasing tree cover to mitigate the effect of warmer weather and to absorb higher rain falls, through micro climates.

Refurbishing, rather than demolition and rebuilding, requiring less materials and generating less waste for dumping, not to mention needing less energy.

Sustainability also has a transport element, including having less out and inward commuting for work, thus reducing vehicle miles, fuel consumption, air pollution and traffic congestion. These impact on the health of Warrington residents and from the exposure to toxic air pollution are being felt by the NHS. Whereas Warrington Borough has a 'duty of care' to its residents. Presently a significant proportion of air pollution is due to vehicle emissions, with high concentrations along urban roads. Unfortunately data recording the level of such emissions is not collected uniformly over Warrington. Recent Coroners Reports have concluded that traffic pollution is a cause of children's death.

Conclusion

The Local Plan needs to show how it will implement National Legal requirements over carbon emissions, clean air, improving health and fitness, reducing resource consumption and conserving the countryside for agricultural production. These can be achieved by a few simple measures:

- (a) Increasing development density of the existing main core of Warrington
- (b) Requiring new buildings to be zero CO₂, and
- (c) Refurbishing (rather than demolition) existing buildings to a zero CO₂ standard
- (d) Encouraging the provision of alternative travel options, to reduce car use

Presently so much of the Draft Local Plan depends on a Western Link Road, which will both worsen the environmental problems faced in Warrington and given the level of Government funding likely to be available might be unachievable. What is the fall back plan ?

LL 14rd Oct. 2022