



St. Helens Council

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15 November 2021

[sent by email]

Dear Mr Bell

Warrington Draft Local Plan Proposed Submission Version 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Warrington Draft Local Plan 2021 Proposed Submission consultation.

St Helens Council is generally supportive of the proposed Plan, which builds on the cooperative working between our two Councils on a number of strategic issues. However, we do have some detailed comments relating to policies below, which we trust you will find useful.

Firstly, and notwithstanding the ongoing, positive dialogue between Officers from both Councils, it is considered beneficial to provide an update on the progress of the emerging St Helens Borough Council Local Plan, as the comments provided in this response must be considered in that context.

St Helens Borough Council submitted the Local Plan Submission Draft (2019) for Examination in October 2020. The associated public hearing sessions were held in May and June 2021. Since then, Officers have been drafting the necessary main modifications as identified through the Matters, Issues and Questions responses, at the hearing sessions and through the Inspector's post hearings advice notes regarding housing land supply and other matters. Public consultation on the proposed main modifications will then be undertaken (following Cabinet's approval on 10 November). It is therefore the case that the preparation of the new St Helens Borough Council Local Plan is at an advanced stage.

Transport



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It is noted that Policy INF1 references the efficiency of the transport network and improving sustainable transport options. St Helens Council welcomes this, particularly the references within sections 1i) and 2f) of the Policy to impacts and opportunities beyond the Borough boundary with respect to general transport principals (including impacts on the Strategic Road Network) and walking and cycling facilities. This approach presents the opportunity for joint working to deliver improvements in transport links between the boroughs, reflecting the ambition of both the draft St Helens Borough and Warrington Local Plans. However, there is currently no reference in the Policy to opportunities to improve public transport provision beyond the Borough boundary, where appropriate. St Helens Councils requests the inclusion of this in section 3 of the Policy, particularly in recognition that people move between our two Boroughs for work (for example accessing jobs at Omega and the proposed Parkside development) and personal reasons. It is important that public transport networks support this.

Joint working between St Helens and Warrington Councils will not only be necessary in terms of delivering sustainable transport infrastructure, but also, working with additional partners, including Highways England, will be critically important in terms of delivering necessary improvements to the Strategic Road Network to support growth, including the M62, Junction 8.

St Helens Borough Council welcomes the commitments made in the draft Warrington Statement of Common Ground (March 2019) (St Helens Borough Local Plan Examination Library document reference SD012) regarding the two Councils working together, in liaison with Highways England, to consider any cross boundary infrastructure or other issues related to the site specific development of the proposed Bold Forest Garden Suburb for residential development and the Parkside (East and West) sites for employment uses in the St Helens Borough Local Plan Submission Draft. With respect to the Parkside sites specifically, Warrington Council's involvement in the Parkside Link Road project is noted and welcomed. Indeed, it would be appropriate to make reference to supporting the delivery of Strategic Rail Freight Interchange (SRFI) facilities within section 5 of the Policy. This is particularly relevant given the proximity of the proposed SRFI at Parkside East in the Local Plan Submission Draft to Warrington Borough.

Employment Land requirement

As outlined in Paragraph 4.2.16, St Helens and Warrington Councils have agreed, through Duty to Co-operate discussions, that a 31.22ha extension of the existing Omega employment site within the boundary of St Helens Borough (identified as site 1EA in the St Helens Local Plan) is allocated to help meet the Warrington's identified employment needs. A minor discrepancy is noted in terms of the site size – paragraph 4.2.16 and the associated Table 6 state 31.80 ha for the site area, but it is 31.22ha in the St Helens Local Plan. This should be corrected for clarity. However, the identification of this site to assist in meeting Warrington's needs is supported and aligns with the St Helens Borough Local Plan Submission Draft.

As you may be aware, the Secretary of State's decision to grant planning permission for Land at Omega Zone 8, West of Omega South and South of the M62 (Council reference P/2020/0061/HYBR and Planning Inspectorate Reference APP/H4315/V/20/3265899) was issued on 11 November 2021. The site boundary extends to an area of approximately 75ha,



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and incorporates the St Helens Local Plan Submission Draft proposed site allocation 1EA (31.22ha site area) within it. Whilst agreement has been reached, as set out above, that the 31.22ha of site 1EA will contribute to meeting the identified employment needs of Warrington Borough, there has been no agreement reached with respect to the additional area of the site now permitted. St Helens Borough Council would welcome discussion with Warrington Borough Council on this matter.

Green Infrastructure

With regards to Policy DC3 – Green Infrastructure, the Plan identifies key elements of the Green Infrastructure (GI) network, and the reference to, and inclusion of, strategic green links connecting the Borough to the wider sub-region is welcome, because many GI assets are cross boundary in nature. In view of this, it would be beneficial to include a specific reference to working in partnership with neighbouring Councils in section 1 of the policy.

We would be grateful if the above comments could be taken into consideration as the Plan progresses. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require any further details.

Your sincerely

Lucy O'Doherty

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