

Objection to Warrington's Local Plan proposals from Clifford Taylor

Firstly I wish to endorse in their entirety the representations on the Local Plan made by Grappenhall and Thelwall Parish Council. The arguments made in that document are couched in planning terms and I do not propose to repeat them in this personal submission because I have nothing to add in planning terms. Instead I would like to express the feelings that I hear from people in Thelwall.

I am a Parish Councillor for Thelwall and I talk to my neighbours a lot. These days the subject is often the Local Plan. There is a great deal of dismay and anger about the plan; I have never known so much feeling against the Borough Council. People feel that they are being betrayed – they say that the Borough Council should be defending the Green Belt that was created only 5 years ago, and they feel that WBC has lost their trust because, undeniably, it is trying so hard to remove the Green Belt in this area.

If I say to them that WBC thinks there are exceptional circumstances, people show disbelief and outrage. They say WBC is trying to sell off the Green Belt. I personally see no 'exceptional circumstances' to justify taking land out of Green Belt. Eddie Stobart and others want land for logistics facilities – that's not exceptional, that's their business; but there are many other places in the wider area, not in Green Belt, where Stobart and the others could go.

Likewise, people say there is no need to take Green Belt for housing. The people who might come to the area to work at a new logistics facility won't live nearby in large numbers, not if the experience in other parts of town is anything to go by. The housing numbers that appear in the Plan are vastly inflated and historically WBC has never achieved build rates half as high as what is proposed in the Plan. The numbers are unnecessary and unachievable. People point to the Fiddlers Ferry site which could be used for housing, thus avoiding loss of Green Belt, and I agree.

Then people also say, 'we all know the road network can't cope; there is frequent congestion near the M6 Junction 20, and at all the swing bridges'. They are right. The extra lorries put on the road by the proposed new logistics facilities will paralyse Junction 20. And if the residents of the Garden Suburb want to go into Warrington they will find huge congestion at the swing bridges. But WBC tells us that the road network can cope. How can that be? The road network in this area is dominated by three Victorian swing bridges which are owned by Peel Holdings who swing them to suit their business. WBC proposes no new crossing of the Ship Canal in this area, and has no credible plan for improving public transport or cycle paths. So the car culture will continue and with the extra lorries as well, air quality will inevitably suffer. Access to town from the Garden Suburb will be harder than ever. And if I point to the Western Link as an attempt to relieve congestion, people reply that not only is it not actually built yet, it is not yet fully funded. And they go on to point out that it will be of no use to people in South-East Warrington who will not be able to access it any more easily than they can access the town centre by using the A50.

People say, 'the landscape where the Garden Suburb will be looks nice and rural now – they should leave it as it is'. I agree. That landscape is a historic agricultural landscape which creates the character of the area and provides the setting for the Grappenhall Conservation Area. WBC policy, quoted in the Local Plan, promises that 'the character of Warrington's places will be maintained and enhanced....a town centre surrounded by attractive countryside and distinct settlements'. They think WBC should 'walk the talk' and that's what the Local Plan isn't doing.

All this taken together adds up to a Local Plan that is not coherent and will not achieve WBCs own objectives – it contains too many disparate elements that are just not credible; it is just not fit for purpose. These views are common here in Thelwall and in Grappenhall too and I share them myself. I see nothing in the Local Plan that suggests that it will actually work. I too believe that the Plan is not sound. I urge WBC to withdraw it and give us instead a Local Plan that we can believe in.

Cliff Taylor Parish Councillor, Thelwall

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