



Warrington Borough Council
Town Hall
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15 November 2021

To Whom it May Concern

Draft Local Plan 2021 Consultation Response

As the Member of Parliament for Warrington North the following is my formal response to Warrington Borough Council's Draft Local Plan 2021 consultation.

The points that I outline below are those which I urge the Council to fully consider at this stage of the process of producing the Warrington Draft Local Plan 2021. I of course reserve the right to make further representations as and when appropriate.

Changes to the previous Draft Local Plan

Changes to the previous version of the Draft Local Plan, made following receipt of feedback from the last consultation, clearly show that the Council has taken on board a number of the comments put forward by residents.

I welcome these changes, which include the reduction in the number of proposed new houses, a reduced plan period and a reduced need for Green Belt usage.

The need for the Local Plan

I acknowledge that Warrington Borough Council is required to have a Local Plan in place. It is a legal requirement by central government for local authorities to plan to meet future development needs including housing, employment, retail, transport, infrastructure, and leisure. In particular it is a statutory requirement for the Local Plan to deliver housebuilding targets that are centrally determined by the Government.

Constituency Office:

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Not having an agreed Local Plan risks a developer free-for-all, with the Council having little ability to turn down applications where development is inappropriate, therefore putting all of our green space at risk.

We know that without a Local Plan development will still take place. However, the Council would not be able to use its own planning policies to help decide where development should go.

The challenge for the Council is to develop a sound Local Plan which adheres to the strict rules set out by national Government, which meets the needs of current and future generations and the ambitions for Warrington residents, and ensures that residents not only have a voice in the process but feel that they are a positive part of the future.

Local residents must be able to access good quality jobs and have a good standard of living. That means homes that meet need, along with the necessary amenities and infrastructure.

Another challenge for the Council is to develop proposals that will encourage the efficient use of land. Protecting our green spaces and ensuring a brownfield first approach wherever possible. This must be the driving force behind the Local Plan.

Housing

I have significant concerns about the targets central government has imposed on our town and the implications this has on the development of this plan.

With specific regard to housing, central government has placed a statutory requirement on local authorities to use the nationally prescribed standard housing formula to calculate the number of new homes to be built. In Warrington's case this is a minimum of 14,688 new homes by 2038.

Alongside councillor colleagues, I will continue to apply pressure on the Government to look again at its unrealistic targets and give local authorities more power to determine their own housing need targets.

Use of brownfield sites

I am pleased to see that the brownfield first approach advocated by many of my residents is being used by the Council.

The Council has worked hard to earmark brownfield land for development wherever possible. But this in itself presents challenges. Available brownfield land for development is not limitless, much is not available and in some cases there are issues around remediation work which prohibits development.





If the national government continues to insist on its minimum target of 14,688 new houses by 2038, there are not enough brownfield sites in the borough to meet this demand. As a result of the national government housing target for Warrington, 580 hectares of current Green Belt will have to be turned over to housing development.

I urge the Council to only designate current Green Belt for development as a last resort and only if the national government insists on it.

The balance of housing and housing need

Over the last 50 years Warrington has been an engine driver for the North West's economy. Key employment areas consist of professional, chemical, scientific and technical activities, wholesale and retail trade, motor repair and manufacturing. We are recognised as one of the most successful centres for Nuclear Services in the UK.

In response to this growth, I recognise that we need to find new homes to meet the needs of both current and future generations. We need homes that are truly affordable. And, we need homes that will enable younger generations to get a foot onto the property ladder.

As is made clear by the House of Commons Library in its 2021 briefing note, *Tackling the under-supply of housing in England*:

"Housing need manifests itself in a variety of ways, such as increased levels of overcrowding, acute affordability issues, more young people living with their parents for longer periods, impaired labour mobility resulting in businesses finding it difficult to recruit and retain staff, and increased levels of homelessness."

The reality is that nationwide we have a housing crisis, which is one of the biggest challenges facing the country. The link between work and affordable, secure housing is broken for many.

I welcome action to ensure that locally we are able to develop affordable homes in the town. In Warrington there is not enough. It is therefore great to see the work that is being done by the Council's housing company, Incrementum Housing Development Company Ltd, to develop affordable, sustainable housing in the town.

However, it is essential that the government tackles the wider issues of affordability – starting by setting out a better and clearer definition of what affordable housing means. At the moment, it relates to the overall market cost of housing. It should be linked to wages so that we have genuinely affordable housing meeting real need.



I urge to the Council to do whatever it can to increase the percentages of affordable homes, homes for rent and first homes included in the Draft Local Plan.

Regeneration

Local authorities are hampered by stringent rules set by government that fail to take into account place-based differences. Local authorities and communities should be given new powers to develop land for more affordable housing by reforming arcane and out of date land purchasing powers.

Climate Change

Following the conclusion of the COP 26 it is clear that the vast majority of nations accept the need for action now to tackle climate change. I have always held the view that we need to think globally but act locally to address the climate emergency.

I wholeheartedly support Warrington's decision to declare a climate emergency.

I would like the Local Plan to include a specific assessment on its impact on climate change and the mitigating measures it proposes to implement.

Peel Hall

A significant issue frequently raised with me since my election relates to Peel Hall. For over 30 years the Council, residents and MPs have fought for the future of this green open space. I spoke against the development of Peel Hall at the recent public local inquiry.

I was deeply disappointed to learn that the Secretary of State, Michael Gove, had taken the decision to rule in favour of the developer Satnam Millennium Ltd, which gives them the go ahead now to build 1,200 homes on the Peel Hall site.

The Housing Secretary's decision was devastating for local residents and representatives who have fought to defend the site for more than 30 years.

Over the years, Warrington Borough Council rejected all the applications from Satnam to develop this site and the subsequent appeals were rejected.

These planning applications have been successfully resisted because the case against developing this valuable site of accessible green open space is demonstrably very powerful, grounded in planning and development legislation and is overwhelmingly supported by residents. And yet, despite these refusals and despite the strength of local opposition to their proposals, the



developer's mantra over the last three decades has been – if at first you don't succeed – try and try again.

The only thing that changed with the latest appeal is that the Government no longer agrees with local residents.

In making this decision, the Secretary of State has pre-empted the outcome of the Draft Local Plan 2021 consultation. And in doing so, the comments of local people - riding roughshod over local decision making. He has disregarded the views of residents, local representatives, the Council and previous inspectors. He took the decision before the consultation period on the Draft Local Plan 2021 had even closed.

Mr Gove's decision has thrown into question what role we as a community and the local authority ultimately have when it comes to the decisions taken on planning matters in our town.

Is it any wonder then that communities often feel that planning is done to them and their views on planning are increasingly ignored or bypassed? This disconnect is amplified by the current national government planning stance that has a presumption in favour of development.

The fight to save Peel Hall will continue and I will do whatever I can to continue that campaign. I will be taking up the issue directly with the Secretary of State for Housing who took this unfathomable decision, raising this on the floor of the House of Commons and I urge the Council to continue to do whatever it can within its power to resist this development.

Like the Council I want to see a Draft Local Plan that continues to develop a Warrington that works for all. The improvements outlined above to the Draft Local Plan 2021 provide a framework upon which we can confidently steer our borough forward and meet the development challenges of the next 18 years.

Yours sincerely,

Charlotte Nichols MP
Labour Member of Parliament for Warrington North