

WALTON PARISH COUNCIL
RESPONSE TO THE
WARRINGTON UPDATED PROPOSED SUBMISSION VERSION
(PSV) LOCAL PLAN (SEPTEMBER 2021)

INTRODUCTION

Walton Parish Council's comments on the 'Warrington's Updated Proposed Submission Version (PSV2) Local Plan (September 2021)' will address how the Plan will impact on Walton Village and Warrington in general. It will also seek to question assumptions which form the basis upon which the Plan has been developed.

Walton Parish Council shares parish boundaries with Hatton in Higher Walton (Moore and Daresbury), and with Stockton Heath in Lower Walton. Walton Village is situated within the Higher Walton part of our Parish. The extremely busy A56 crosses through the Parish and is a major road from J11 on the M56 taking traffic through to Lower Walton and Warrington town centre. It is essentially an expressway. Our residents use Stockton Heath as a local centre for retail, restaurants, drinking outlets as well as medical facilities, schools and library facilities. Housing is located mainly in the village and semi-rural/rural areas.

Walton Parish Council also recognises that the plan will also impact on many of our neighbouring parishes and our Walton residents have friends and family across Warrington and have need to access all parts of Warrington. It is in this context that the following comments are made.

AREAS OF CONCERN

- Green Belt and proposed new house build numbers
- Transport Infrastructure and local network 'pinch points'
- The Western Link
- Air Quality

GREEN BELT AND PROPOSED NEW BUILD HOUSE NUMBERS

Firstly, we greatly welcome the Borough Council's decision to remove the South West Urban Extension in Walton from this current plan and we fully recognise that people need houses and those houses have to go somewhere.

We also recognise the value of brown field land in fulfilling this demand in part.

NPPF paragraph 140 states that :

'Once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified.'

Walton Parish Council challenges the requirement of PSV2 that 816 houses are built every year and suggests that a more realistic and deliverable target is set at a lower build rate of 600 per year. Over the past ten years the average build rate in Warrington has been 567 and the Borough Council's own Housing Strategy '2018-2028' (written in 2018) called for 586 per year. 816 as a target has been imposed by government and is not achievable. By following this requirement, whole swathes of Green Belt are likely to disappear forever.

PSV2 continues to perpetuate the rationale of past New Town planning and, therefore, does not align with NPPF policies stating that plans should 'be prepared positively, in a way that is aspirational but deliverable.

Although we welcome PSV2's development of brown field sites such as Fiddlers Ferry and town centre development as a means of reducing the pressure on Green Belt, we assert that it does not go far enough and is not visionary enough. Fiddlers Ferry already has two rail links which can be developed further into a more cohesive rail strategy, linking Liverpool, Manchester, Warrington and further afield via HS2. It is capable of providing housing and employment which will be sustainable with good transport links and offers the possibility of new rail stations opening up.

Fiddlers Ferry could open up an area for development which would enable a greater concentration of housing to the west and northwest, between Fiddlers Ferry and the Liverpool-Warrington-Manchester railway where it intersects with Farnworth Road. A new station would give easy access to Warrington, Liverpool and Manchester. This would be a driver for economic growth and is a great opportunity for Warrington.

In Stretton there are multiple proposals for the local road network. It has yet to be proved that the upgrade of the A49 roundabout at Longwood Road would bring any significant improvement, nor would the upgrade of the traffic lights at Lyons Lane. The Cat and Lion relief strategic road link connecting near the Spire Hospital on the A49 would increase congestion and backing up to the slip roads on M56 J10.. Instead, any distributor road should connect directly to M56, at J10, thus reducing any impact on the local network. The 'stopping up' of the B5356 at the Cat and Lion junction with Stretton Road will severely impact on local residents and will increase local journey times, distances and air pollution. This would appear to be in contravention to NPPF guidelines.

Walton Parish Council is of the view that if more realistic numbers were used in PSV2 the need to use such large areas of Green Belt would be removed and building on Green Belt should only happen when all available brown field sites have been exhausted. Green Belt land should never be assumed to be a 'land bank' for building houses at any time in the future.

Walton Parish Council requests that Warrington Borough Council challenges the government on these high numbers before enshrining them in the Local Plan.

TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE AND LOCAL NETWORK ' PINCH POINTS'

The focus of PSV2 is still on building satellite housing developments (Garden Suburbs) where opportunities to improve the transport infrastructure are extremely limited thus making these developments unsustainable. For instance the South East Warrington Urban Extension (SEWUE) follows the old model of putting housing in areas where the transport infrastructure is already inadequate, at capacity and will not be able to absorb increased numbers of cars and HGVs. Public transport is almost non-existent and services are being cut. Warrington's Own Buses are investing in a new electric fleet but there is little confidence that bus services will increase significantly and be cheap enough to enable a high take up by the public in this area thereby making it sustainable. Most of the proposed new developments in South Warrington follow this model and, by definition, are not sustainable.

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Stockton Lane is another example of a poorly considered and incomplete strategy. The location of this development is inappropriate as the current road system is inadequate. It is a single carriageway, next to the canal. It has been closed off for many years as a result of a fatality when a car came off the road into the canal. PSV2 suggests that traffic from this development would enter the main highways at the Lumb Brook viaduct and the junction with Knutsford Road. Traffic would back up on the local roads as well as the Knutsford Road. The junction at the other end leads to a hump backed bridge at Grappenhall and this again would seriously impact the traffic lights on the Knutsford Road.

PSV2 provides no credible strategy showing how existing pinch points in South Warrington, Stockton Heath High Street, Stockton Heath Swing Bridge, the Lumb Brook Underpass Bridge, the Cat & Lion junction in Stretton and the Latchford/Kingsway gyratory, will be relieved. The inevitable increase in domestic and commercial traffic that out of town developments will bring to the existing infrastructure will mean that traffic will be brought to a halt more frequently than is currently experienced. This, in turn, will bring with it increased levels of pollution. It should be noted that Peel Ports has aspirations to significantly increase journeys on the Manchester Ship Canal which will compound current problems as the swing bridges will be closed more frequently. In addition, these Victorian infrastructures are controlled by a third party (Peel Ports) over which WBC has no control.

The importance of the Green Belt in the Walton area is recognised in terms of the risk of merger with Moore and developed areas Runcorn within Halton. It is noted that Halton BC raised objection to the 2017 PDO on this basis.

The South East Urban Extension of 4,200 houses will generate an intolerable increase in traffic. The A49 in Stockton Heath is already at capacity at peak times.

Our Walton residents use these roads on a daily basis and Walton Parish Council is not convinced that PSV2 addresses current problems but further compounds them.

THE WESTERN LINK

In PSV 1, the South Western Urban Extension was said to be the 'trigger' for the Western Link and the road would not be built until building of the 1,600 houses in Walton had been substantially progressed. Now that this has been removed from PSV2, the business case is more severely compromised despite partial government funding. Major concerns have been expressed that such a highly complex and technical scheme for a single carriageway road, at a budget of £212m is unrealistic and will mean that the scheme will be undeliverable. It is an extremely complex and high risk civil engineering project which has already been subject to delay. Such delays and the fact that the revised commencement date is now 2023 with completion in 2026 can only mean that costs (especially in a post-covid world) are likely to escalate even more. It is essential that if this scheme continues, costs are re-assessed to ensure that the Western Link is deliverable within the Outlined Business Case before proceeding.

This road will have issues regarding the high level bridge crossing of the Manchester Ship Canal (potential gradient issues); it will cross under the Network Rail London to Glasgow line (Victorian Walled viaduct); it will cross under the Network Rail West Coast mainline viaduct.

The South Western Terminal shown on page 3 of the Build Out Scenario, connecting the Western Link with the Chester Road - is essentially a huge roundabout (referred to as a controlled junction). It will severely impact the character of Lower Walton which is a semi-rural area.

We acknowledge that a slip-road into Walton Lea has been included in the design. However, to our knowledge no consultation has taken place with residents and with Walton this major 'controlled junction' right on their doorstep. Walton Parish Council would like to know:

- a) has any consultation taken place with residents and the Walton Lea Partnership;
- b) what form this consultation took;
- c) when did the consultation take place?

The Centre Park Link from Gainsborough Road through to the town centre has generally had a positive impact on both local and town centre traffic, however the Western Link, a single carriageway road connecting two existing dual carriageways, would not seem to have the capacity to cope with a potential influx of cars and HGVs rat running from J11 on the M56 to Sankey Way A57 and inevitably on to the M62 as well as traffic avoiding the Mersey Gateway tolls. The Western Link is nearly irrelevant to local travel needs in Stockton Heath, Grappenhall and Latchford. The potential for HGVs and private car rat-running through the villages of Stretton, Hatton and Daresbury is a real threat and cause for concern to local residents.

AIR QUALITY

It would seem fundamental that the quality of the air we breathe has a direct affect on the health of the population, particularly the most vulnerable. This has been sadly demonstrated by the death of Ella Kissi-Debra in London where the coroner confirmed in 2020 that air pollution was clearly the cause of her death. In Britain, it is estimated that every year 40,000 people die prematurely due to poor air quality. Warrington has sadly contributed to this figure as in 2018 it was estimated that 145 people died prematurely every year due to poor air quality. How can this be allowed to continue?

A report by academics at Manchester University (Setting Climate Commitments for Warrington) indicated that Warrington Borough Council's previous Local Plan and LTP4 were in breach of the commitments enshrined in the Paris Agreement 2015. Warrington declared a 'Climate Emergency in June 2019 and 'Green Energy Strategy in September 2019 and does not yet appear to have moved forward in its stated aims. It continues to pursue outdated policies which do not reflect the huge changes there have been over the past couple of years.

Over the past couple of years, during Covid and since, patterns of working, living and travelling have started to change. In order for Warrington to make its 'fair share' to lower carbon emissions, it will have to take a wide range of measures to reduce fossil fuel use and move away from plans to build more roads encouraging more car use on already badly congested road infrastructure.

Warrington has historically underspent on air quality monitoring. It has even fallen to Stockton Heath Parish Council to take it upon themselves to provide an up to date air quality monitor which not only monitors only measure levels but also PM2.5. It does not measure PM10. PM2.5 and PM10 are the most dangerous particulates for human health.

There are 9 measures in the Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) still to be completed. The first is the Local Plan and the lack of significant change in respect of housing numbers and transport infrastructure means that it is likely that the mistakes of the past will continue to encourage a car based economy, thus impacting on future air quality

Walton Parish Council expresses concern that Warrington Borough Council does not have up to date air quality monitoring throughout the town which measure NO2, PM2.5 and PM10 for without this information, it is impossible to draw sound conclusions as to the impact of increased traffic on our highway network on our Walton residents and Warrington residents in general.

SUMMARY

We welcome the withdrawal of the South Western Urban Extension from the Plan. Walton Parish Council does not consider that the Plan is sound, justified or deliverable for the following reasons:

- The projected housing numbers are not deliverable and Walton Parish Council requests that Warrington Borough Council challenges these numbers;
- The transport infrastructure requires a complete strategic review which will enable housing development on brown field sites first before green belt land is considered;
- A transport infrastructure review to ensure that current highway network 'pinch points' are not made worse but improved;
- A review of the Business Case for the Western Link;
- A consultation with residents in Walton Lea and the Walton Lea Partnership must take place before the Western Link progresses any further.
- A lack of reliable air quality data makes the Local Plan unsafe for Walton residents.