

# **Stockton Heath Parish Council**

## **response to the**

### **Warrington updated Proposed Submission Version**

### **(PSV) Local Plan (September 2021)**

#### **Introduction**

Stockton Heath Parish Council's (SHPC) comments on the 'Warrington updated Proposed Submission Version (PSV) Local Plan (September 2021)' will address how proposals in the Plan will impact primarily on the village and its residents, but also Warrington in general. It will, in addition, question assumptions used to develop the proposals.

Stockton Heath is a village in south Warrington. It is a busy residential local centre with retail, restaurants and drinking outlets. There are local medical facilities, schools and a library. The northern boundary of the village is the Manchester Ship Canal (MSC) and the southern boundary is the Bridgewater Canal. The A49 runs approximately north/south through the village and the A56 east west. They cross in the village centre. To get to Warrington town the A49 crosses the MSC via a swing bridge which was installed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. There is a high-level crossing for light traffic, also installed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

From the south it is necessary to cross the Bridgewater Canal, the Manchester Ship Canal and the river Mersey to access the facilities in Warrington: the railway stations, the general hospital, the town centre, the peripheral retail parks, the peripheral employment areas and Birchwood science park.

Through traffic from both the south and the east during the day time is practically continuous. Swing bridge closures cause congestion and stationary vehicles.

Housing to the south is mostly low density. Housing in the village centre is mostly terraced. Although there are two car parks in the village, parking in the village, both for residents and visitors, is frequently difficult. There are no EV charging points.

It is essential to appreciate the background described above to understand the Parish Council comments on the latest version of the Local Plan.

The Stockton Heath PC does not consider that the updated (September 2021) PSV Local Plan has effectively addressed the issues expressed by the Parish Council in 2019. Although the reduction in the amount of Green Belt land scheduled for development in the 2019 Plan is welcomed, the Parish Council does not consider that the loss of Green Belt, still allocated for

development, can be justified, is necessary or that the impact on Stockton Heath village from the increase in traffic is acceptable. The new Plan covers development in Warrington up to 2038, although house building numbers are proposed for beyond this date and could be brought forward.

## **Issues of Concern**

New house build numbers proposed.

Building on Green Belt.

Infrastructure and traffic.

and

Air quality in Stockton Heath.

## **House build numbers**

The new Plan requires 816 new houses per year to be built in Warrington. On average, over the last 10 years, 567 (net figure) new houses per year have been built. The Borough's own Housing Strategy '2018-2028' document, written in 2018, called for 586 per year. The latest population growth forecast from the ONS also suggests that between 550 and 600 per year will be needed.

The 816 number has been imposed on the Borough Council by central government, which insists its standard method for determining house build numbers be used. This has to be challenged.

**Stockton Heath PC asks for the 816 house builds per year requirement to be challenged and reduced to a more realistic 600 per year.**

## **Building on Green Belt land**

The proposal to create the 'South East Urban Extension' to the south east of the village on Green Belt land, which will comprise 4,200 new houses (at least 2,400 within the Plan period), is strongly objected to, as is the creation of a logistics site on 137 hectares of Green Belt close to junction 20 of the M6/56.

The Green Belt to the south is highly valued and enjoyed by Stockton Heath residents.

The Parish Council believes that, if more realistic house build numbers are used, the Green Belt release for the 'Urban Extension' will not be required. The Six/56 proposal uses a large area of Green Belt land for comparatively few jobs. Logistics operations should be close to railway sidings to reduce HGV movements and not near an already very busy motorway junction.

The Council also believes that Green Belt land anywhere in Warrington should not be developed until all available brown field sites have been built on. If, as SHPC thinks, the housing number of 816 is far too high, a lower housing number would reduce the amount of green belt land needed.

**Stockton Heath PC objects to both the housing and the industrial development proposals on the Green Belt land in south Warrington. If, however, Green Belt is allowed to be developed, then brown field land must be developed first and suitable protection for trees and wildlife on the brown land put in place.**

### **Infrastructure and traffic**

Should the Plan not be modified, proposed developments to the south east of Stockton Heath will result in a significant increase in vehicle traffic both into and through the village. Most of the facilities in Warrington that residents will want to access – two railway stations, the general hospital, town centre shops, retail parks, employment areas and the science employment park, etc. - are in the north across the canals and river.

The ambition in the Warrington transport plan, that residents should be able to cycle or walk to their place of employment will not be achievable at the development proposed on Green Belt land to the south east of Stockton Heath.

Residents, who would occupy the development, will either drive north across the canals and river to the employment areas in Warrington or out to the motorways to employment outside of the Town.

The current infrastructure in the south of Warrington is already inadequate at peak times to accommodate the volume of traffic using it, which is frequently stationary. When the Manchester Ship Canal bridges swing to allow ships through, traffic flow stops for a significant period.

It is worth recalling that, when the Warrington 'New Town' was being developed 35 years ago, it was planned to build an expressway from Stretton, in the south, across the two canals and the river, to Birchwood. A science park employment area would have been created at Stretton. It was considered necessary to do this before house building commenced to the south of Stockton Heath. Land was compulsorily purchased for this plan and for housing development. Funding for the 'New Town' was withdrawn, however, so development, including the new expressway and high level bridge over the canals and river, did not proceed. Some of the land had planning consent and these areas are now being

developed 35 years later for housing, but without the necessary infrastructure to support it. The remainder became Green Belt.

It is this Green Belt land which the PSV Local Plan (September 21) will release for the 'South East Urban Extension', but still there will be no infrastructure to support it. Car ownership is now much higher than it was 35 years ago.

## **Other supporting infrastructure**

Although the Plan will identify land allocated for schools, medical centres, retail outlets etc., the Plan can have no influence in determining when or if these facilities will be completed. The Borough Council has little power to build anything. These facilities will only be provided when sufficient demand has been generated through house building. Experience suggests they will come much later if at all.

**Stockton Heath Parish Council strongly objects to building on Green Belt land for the S. E. Urban Extension. Traffic from the additional 4,200 houses will have to use the A49 London Road, which is already at capacity at peak times. The minor junction adjustments proposed are only to ease entry onto the A49. Much of the traffic will then go through Stockton Heath village causing even more congestion. If, however, this development does proceed, infrastructure to prevent further congestion in Stockton Heath village must be in place first and long term (at least 5 years) financial support for public transport must be a condition.**

## **Air quality**

The Parish Council has installed an air quality monitor on the A49, London Road in a residential part of Stockton Heath. This has been in place now for almost two years. It measures the contamination in the air where vehicles enter the village. Two contaminants are of concern; nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) and very small particulates known as PM<sub>2.5</sub>.

The latest World Health Organisation (WHO) guidance for the yearly average of NO<sub>2</sub> contamination is no more than 10 micro grams per cubic metre and for PM<sub>2.5</sub> it is no more than 5. The Parish Council monitor recorded an average between September 2020 and September 2021 of 19.97 for NO<sub>2</sub> and 8.47 for PM<sub>2.5</sub>. This is already above WHO air quality guideline aspirations. The 24 hour averages were, at times, also above the guidelines.

NO<sub>2</sub> comes primarily from vehicle internal combustion engines.

PM2.5 emissions come from several sources. Windblown dust and smoke from wood burning stoves will contribute. Vehicles produce them from exhaust pipes, and also from brake, tyre and road wear. The growth in electric vehicles is not the solution as they will also generate PM2.5 from their brakes, tyres and road wear.

Much of the additional traffic from the developments already underway will access the Town's facilities using the existing A49 London Road. It will be funnelled into Stockton Heath to cross the canals and river. This means air quality will deteriorate further. Warrington Borough has already declared the A49 immediately to the north of the village an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) based on the levels of NO2.

The additional vehicles from the 4,200 new houses proposed in the Plan will further increase air contamination. That is not acceptable to the Parish Council.

**Stockton Heath Parish Council has measured both the PM2,5 and NO2 contamination in the village. The yearly average is above the latest WHO air quality guideline aspirations. At times, the 24 hourly concentrations are also above the WHO guidelines. Vehicular traffic is one of the causes of PM2.5 and NO2 contamination. Further development to the south east of the village will increase traffic through the village and further compromise air quality and should not be permitted.**

## **Summary**

**The proposed developments in the PSV Local Plan (September 2021) will:**

- destroy valued Green Belt land to the south east of Stockton Heath village,**
- further congest the existing road network with the additional traffic which will be generated,**
- further compromise air quality in the village.**

**Should development, however, be allowed, infrastructure to prevent further congestion in Stockton Heath village must be in place first and long term (at least 5 years) financial support for public transport be a condition.**

**The number of new houses per year proposed in the Plan (816) is significantly higher than the average built in Warrington over the last 10 years (567) and**

**higher than ONS and the Borough Council's own forecasts and should be reduced.**

**Stockton Heath Parish Council requests that the proposed 'South East Urban Extension', comprising 4,200 new houses, and the Six/56 distribution area be taken out of the Plan. Brown land must be developed before Green Belt land and suitable protection for trees and wildlife on the brown land put in place.**