

RSWF Response to WBC Local Plan Consultation: Report 1 Appendix – Key Questions on Transport and Infrastructure

- 1. Council traffic planners have confirmed LTP4 (an integral supporting document for PSVLP21) as an aspirational ‘concept’ document which only outlines some options and preferences.** Therefore, it lacks important detail for residents to make truly informed judgements. The schemes, or possible schemes, listed in the LTP4 will cost a very significant sum. Given the pressures on overall UK public expenditure, and specific pressures on the Department for Transport, there is little prospect that no more than a very small fraction of Government subsidy will be realised within the timescale of the Local Plan 2021 – 2038 period. Almost all of the LTP4 is an aspirational wish list and no firm timescales are offered regarding delivery. Therefore, the Council should not commit to large scale development in the South of Warrington until they achieve certainty of the necessary transport infrastructure.
- 2. Air Quality is a major issue in Warrington with the Town identified by the World Health Organisation as being in the top 5 towns/cities in England that exceeds the pollutants limit.** It is therefore very likely that the proposed new housing in South Warrington (circa 5,000 dwellings), together with the Six/56 and the potential Stobart’s National Distribution Centre will have a deleterious effect upon air quality and noise, particularly in existing congested locations such as Stockton Heath and Latchford Village. How can the Council justify proposing the above developments in light of recent coroner judgements and the Governments drive to reduce Air pollutants (Clean Air Strategy 2019)
- 3. No credible strategy is being put forward as to how existing highway congested pinch points are to be relieved.** These include Stockton Heath High Street, Stockton Heath Swing Bridge, Lumb Brook Underpass Bridge, Knutsford Road Swing Bridge, and the Latchford/Kingsway gyratory. The effects of the increased domestic and commercial traffic on the existing highway infrastructure will be enormous, i.e. A49, A50, A56, bringing increased pollution, noise and congestion.
- 4. LTP4 (apart from the Western Link which adds little or no benefit for the majority of South Warrington commuters) excludes any significant improvements or forward investment in the south of Warrington’s highway infrastructure** in terms of existing roads and bridge crossings of all three waterways (Bridgewater Canal, Manchester Ship Canal and the River Mersey). Congestion at these key points will only get worse resulting in more pollution and potential health issues.
- 5. There appears to be no coherent strategy for managing any adverse effects from increased LGV/HGV movements,** including those that would result from the proposed Six/56 employment park, potential Stobart’s national distribution centre, and Warrington Business Park developments etc. There is no rail or water access to either the Six/56 or Stobart’s developments which will inevitably strengthen the focus of freight movement exclusively upon road vehicles. Both schemes contravene the Council’s and Government policy in regard to supporting rail freight and sustainable use of existing waterways i.e. Manchester Ship Canal.

- 6. The Council's traffic model is unrealistic, it assumes that the swing bridges are continually in place and do not open.** Also, the age of the bridges could be a serious issue in the near future due to increased openings and traffic usage. The model also makes no allowance for disruptive road works anywhere in the Borough, which is both illogical and unrealistic.
- 7. The concept of a Mass Transit System (MTS) is floated in LTP4;** however it is clear from the documentation that the concept of developing a MTS is at a very early stage. Therefore it is totally inappropriate for the Council to indicate a Mass Transit Safeguarded Corridor (MTSC) within the SEWUE that creates Public concerns and resultant property Blighting (potential link between Stockton Lane and the proposed High Level Cantilever Bridge). The Council needs to further explain their actions with informed information or alternatively remove the MTSC forthwith and allay resident concerns.
- 8. There is no clear strategy that ensures traffic generated by the SEWUE housing and the neighbourhood centre will not have an adverse impact on the local community.** The effects on the current highway infrastructure will be enormous, i.e. A49, A56, A50, and in particular Stockton Heath High Street, Stretton Village, Grappenhall Road, London Road, Lumb Brook Underbridge, Wilderspool Causeway and Latchford Village. There is also no evidence to support the assumption that the proposed Cat and Lion relief strategic link road will reduce traffic travelling from Stockton Heath via the A49 to the M56 J10.
- 9. Council Officers have repeatedly stated that the SEWUE Cat and Lion relief strategic link road is only illustrative;** however it currently indicates a new traffic junction on the A49 (between the Cat and Lion Junction and the M56 J10). This suggestion will undoubtedly cause severe traffic congestion. This matter requires a fundamental review with Highways England, as this ad hoc illogical solution has the potential to create serious traffic congestion problems, particularly on the M56 J10 and A49 at peak periods. An alternative solution i.e. connect the proposed relief road directly to the M56 J10 should be investigated (as per The 1973 Warrington New Town Outline Plan)
- 10. The success of LTP4 is dependent on securing significant changes in public behaviour, including walking, cycling and bus patronage.** No evidence is offered, other than optimistic hope that these changes of mode, away from car usage, will in fact occur. The LTP4 also envisages tripling local public transport use during the Local Plan period. However bus use has fallen by almost 50% over the past decade, therefore this laudable aspiration is very likely to be unattainable due to high car ownership, Town Centre retail decline, and traffic congestion resulting in lack of certainty and reliability and relatively high fares.
- 11. The LTP4 makes no reference to replacing or undertaking a major review of the three 19th century swing bridges (c.125 years old),** therefore how credible or viable is a local Transport Plan that fails to address the Borough's reliance on Victorian infrastructure

that is controlled entirely by a third party whilst proposing unprecedented large scale housing and employment developments without any surety of the necessary highway infrastructure to serve the resultant mass increase in traffic.

12. The conceptual high-level Cantilever Bridge replacement is only planned for the medium term which will present major planning problems. In addition, the PSVLP21 indicates safeguarded land adjacent to the weight restricted Cantilever Bridge. A serious unanswered question is what will the new bridge be designed to carry? Will it include HGV's or be weight-restricted to light traffic as currently? . The SEWUE plan indicates the MTSC (comments as per Q7). Is the new bridge to be designed to accommodate a MTS (bus or tram systems) and what plans are there for the necessary highway infrastructure that will clearly affect large swathes of housing within Grappenhall and Stockton Heath. This lack of clarity of detail is a major omission and raises serious Public concerns.

13. Given that the 1973 rezoning of land within the approved Warrington New Town Outline Plan of land South to the MSC went hand in hand with the associated Proposed new highways infrastructure (North/South expressway and new High Level Bridge over the MSC) and Cheshire County Councils Highways Authority statement that no more than 1,000 additional houses be built in the rezoned land Until the new highway infrastructure was completed. Can the Council explain on what grounds have they permitted since 1973 the construction of circa over 2,500 houses together with a further 800 On site without undertaking the proposed major Highway infrastructure requirements. There have been no material improvements to the local South Warrington transport network and it is conservatively estimated that traffic movements have tripled over the past 5 decades, which has had a detrimental effect on local residents. Furthermore can the Council now clarify on what grounds can they now propose the SEWUE and SEW Employment Area without first delivering the previously approved Highway infrastructure?

Conclusion

The thirteen observations/ questions offer some indication of the depth and breadth of scrutiny and research which has been conducted by RSWF Group. The working party included people from a range of backgrounds, including transport consultants, mechanical and civil engineers and former senior managers in the transport industry. The resultant report raises serious questions which Warrington Borough Council must answer/address.