

Local Plan,
Planning Policy and Programmes,
Growth Directorate,
Warrington Borough Council,
East annexe,
Town Hall,
Sankey Street,
Warrington
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Chris Lewis



Draft Local Plan 2021 OBJECTION

Sirs,

Whilst it is pleasing to see that the scale of the Local Plan as a whole has been revised down, the development, as it stands, is still a huge impingement onto Green Belt land and of particular abhorrence to me and my family, is the sudden inclusion of the Thelwall Heys (MD5) site. This will have a major impact on our immediate area.

With respect to this new, rushed inclusion, of Thelwall Heys (MD5 site) I would like to make the following specific points:

- I walk the north side canal path from Pickering Bridge to the A50 crossing on an almost daily basis. It is of huge recreational value to me, and I find the experience to be a great value to my mental and physical well being. The thought of a housing estate destroying the vistas, peace and general character of the canal bank is a horrendous contemplation. The length of canal bank between Grappenhall and Lymm is one of the last portions not be overlooked by urbanisation. It is a gem in South Warrington and worth preserving on that basis alone.
- The proposed area is clearly valuable greenbelt land and has been included as such since the early 2000s when a previous proposal to develop the site was overturned by the Council in 2006. How can the council now believe that this site is less valuable, particularly as it intends to be building other greenfield sites? The argument that the canal should now mark the end of urban development and that building on Thelwall Heys “would not have a material impact” is moribund. In 20 years time, the argument will

be that Weast Lane marks the extent instead. We have already drawn the line at Stockport road, and defended it. What has changed?

- Thelwall Heys has “Special Landscape Character Status” as referred to by WBC in their submission to a public enquiry regarding their Unitary Development Plan. This followed a self-commissioned landscape appraisal in 2004. The report mentioned that the site had “special character” due to its small-scale landscape of pasture, hedgerows and mature trees. WBC have not made clear why this special character is no longer present and what has changed on this site to make it worthy of destruction.
- On my regular recreational use of the area it is obvious that wildlife is abundant. Other than my personal experience of seeing a variety of birds and mammals, environmental surveys have indicated the presence of 32 different species of bird, several being on the endangered red list. It is clear that development of the site would see the loss of a large number of mature trees and hedgerows which provide valuable habitat. There has been no further environmental assessment since the rushed inclusion of the site in the revised plan.
- Development of the site would see the loss of unusually high quality agricultural land. 68% of the site was classified in a 1995 MAFF survey as grades 1 & 2. Nationally 20% of agricultural land is of this high quality. This area is therefore valuable in this right. The historic Thelwall Heys property is itself grade II listed and building around this property would fundamentally change its character.

With respect to the revised Local Plan as a whole, I would refer the reader to my original objection made on the 26th September 2017. Most of the points made there are still salient as the revised plan is effectively a reduced version of the original. I would also like to make the following additional points:

- The plan defines a rate of construction of house of 816 per year until 2038. This is a greater number than have ever been built before in the town. Recent calculations suggest a smaller future population. How are the proposed number of houses now justifiable?
- The plan still intends to develop areas of greenbelt (1400 acres). Given there is uncertainty regarding the actual number of houses needed, is the release of Greenbelt justifiable?
- Although reduced, the plan contains the intention to build almost 15,000 homes over the next 18 years. It is apparent that little thought has gone into the provision of infrastructure to support the increase in population and connected pressure on roads, bridges and public services such as schools and hospitals. Existing infrastructure is already under stress with obvious bottlenecks caused by the lack of high level crossings of the Ship Canal.
- The plan also requires the removal of huge tract of Greenbelt at the M6/56 junction for the proposed “6/56” project for “large scale distribution, logistics and industrial uses”. Using prime green belt land for industrial purposes is clearly against the concept and spirit of green belt. There is also a lack of detail about the types of employment that will

be available, by such a development but much concern that employment will mainly be low skilled and low paid which would not be provided by locals.

In conclusion I would say that the MD5 site (Thelwall Heys) looks to have been thrown into the Revised Local Plan at the last minute for reasons that remain unclear and I have no doubt the motives are sinister. Its inclusion stands contrary to WBC's own defence of the area in previous attempts to develop the site.

As usual I find the conduct of the council with regard to the Local Plan and in particular, the inclusion of this MD5 site at the last minute to be clandestine and nefarious. Also the practise of re-launching proposals for projects with minor changes in the hope that people fail to notice and fail to object a 2nd or 3rd time is to be deplored.

Yours sincerely



Chris Lewis