

[REDACTED]

From: Liz Hull [REDACTED]
Sent: 14 November 2021 14:55
To: Local Plan
Subject: Warrington local plan - resident comments

Warrington Local Plan Objection

Dear Warrington Borough Council

Thank you for asking for views on the latest draft of the Local Plan (LP).

While I recognise the need to build more homes to address the housing shortage and affordability issues especially for young people, I have a number of objections to the latest draft plan. My comments are focussed on South Warrington as this is where I have lived since 1994.

1. Overall housing requirement

The calculation for the overall housing requirement appears to be flawed as it is based on out-of-date data and a questionable methodology in terms of growth rates. This has recently been recognised by the Government and therefore will hopefully change in due course. I appreciate that WBC has to comply with the laws and methods that are currently recommended, however, as the required numbers are likely to change, surely the finalisation of the LP should be deferred until more accurate figures can be used? In particular the possibility of a reduction in the overall housing requirement would have far reaching consequences for the preservation of the green belt – something which all the WBC parties have recently confirmed they support.

2. Phasing of builds

The phasing of the LP is very unclear. Given the potential changes to numbers noted in 1. above, it would make sense to prioritise the release of land for development such that brownfield regeneration and infill is first to be made available to developers in the LP whilst the most sensitive green belt release is last. If this is left to the developers to determine they will likely prioritise the easier to develop and more valuable green belt land to the South of Warrington.

3. Infrastructure and connectivity

The LP proposes building 4,200 new homes in the South East Urban Extension which will put ~8,000 additional cars onto the streets. Very little thought appears to have been given to how the road networks will cope with this huge increase in traffic. A new crossing of the Bridgewater Canal is proposed, however, this will be for cycles and pedestrians only (and possibly buses?). It is unclear where this will be as:

- there appear to be very few options other than to destroy sports fields at Grappenhall Sports Club which is a vital community asset used by hundreds of local residents for sport and recreation.
- when my husband attended the Halliwell Jones presentation he was informed by council officers that Stockton Lane will not be reopened.

There is also no indication as to when this will be phased in the LP.

The only means of getting across the Bridgewater Canal currently is to cross the single track weight restricted Stanley Lunt bridge, or to use the Lumb Brook Road single track bridge under the canal. The other option for road users is to use the very busy A50 or London Road.

The swing bridge crossings of the Manchester Ship Canal are notoriously busy even when the bridges are open,

when the bridges are shut to traffic, the queues are horrendous.

The existing infrastructure struggles to cope with demand right now (and fails spectacularly when there is an incident on any of the surrounding motorways often leading to gridlock on the town's roads). Despite this, there is a vague proposal for a cycle/pedestrian bridge over the Bridgewater Canal and no additional crossings of the Manchester Ship Canal.

There is no clarity on where the new roads needed will be sited and when they will be phased in the timetable.

The huge increase in traffic will negatively impact road safety. As a resident of Grappenhall I am well aware of the dangers posed by the increasing numbers of commercial and private vehicles using Broad Lane over the last 20 years. The introduction of a 20 MPH speed limit on the residential stretch of Broad Lane seems to have done little to reduce traffic speeds through the village. The LP seems set to make matters even worse than they are now.

4. Air quality

The LP is promoting the use of private vehicles by building so many houses away from rail and public transport infrastructure. The potential for queueing traffic caused by the poor connectivity and lack of investment in infrastructure noted in 3 above is clear. The impact queueing traffic already has on air quality when the Ship Canal bridges are closed to traffic is tangible - this would get massively worse under the LP.

The increased HGV traffic generated by the employment zone near the M6/M56 junction also negatively impacts air quality.

5. Impact of Northern Powerhouse Rail link

There is no mention in the LP of the preferred route for the rail link between Warrington Bank Quay station and the HS2 spur at High Legh. Clearly this will have to cut through South Warrington and therefore I would expect it to have an impact on where housing developments will be appropriate and where not. Whilst I understand that decisions have to be made without full knowledge as to everything that will happen in the future, as this is such a major transport link the preferred route for which will be announced in the next few months, it seems sensible to wait until the route is known before finalising the LP for the next 18+ years.

6. Protection of green belt and local ecology

The impact of the LP on green belt is catastrophic and gives a green light to developers that no land in Warrington is incapable of being built on.

When lots of other councils are looking to encourage wildlife and local ecology through schemes such as re-wilding, WBC's draft LP promotes widespread destruction of hedgerows, wooded areas and habitats for birds, insects and other wildlife.

7. Regeneration of Warrington town centre

Warrington's centre, in common with many similar sized towns, is suffering from boarded up shops and low employment levels. The LP does very little to promote the regeneration of the centre. This is a huge opportunity for WBC to make a statement on town centre living and to create a buzz about the centre. The centre will never rival those of Manchester and Liverpool but there is no reason it can't become as vibrant as say Altrincham and other towns that are bucking the current trend of downward spiralling.

WBC should do more in the LP to attract better quality employment as opposed to the usual big warehouses that it has become known for. How about designated areas in the town for green energy businesses? Or for professional consultancies based around Net Zero?

8. Protection of the landscape and character of Warrington's villages

The green belt was established to protect the landscape and character of the areas surrounding the centre of Warrington. As far as I'm concerned this was a sensible move that the current LP decimates. If the LP goes through in its current form, there will be no definition of the individual villages, it will become a single sprawling conurbation with an empty centre and everyone in the suburbs using their cars to drive to other towns and cities for employment and leisure.

In my view the LP is:

- not sound
- not fit for purpose
- too vague in many crucial areas especially around transport infrastructure
- not sufficiently focussed on regenerating the town centre
- the beginning of the end of the notion of Green Belt in Warrington.

Yours faithfully,

Liz Hull

