

A Response to the revised Warrington Local Plan 2021

Angela Richardson-Highton, South Warrington Resident

I am writing to respond to the new, revised Draft Local Plan which sets out the proposed basis for planning decisions in the town until 2038. It is a revised and updated plan following the initial version published in 2019.

As a grateful resident of [REDACTED] Appleton, a sheltered housing scheme administered by Warrington Housing I have, since moving here from Suffolk, three years ago, taken a very keen interest in the proposed development and have reviewed the surrounding area with interest and have been keen to participate in the local area and surrounding communities.

I attended the Wolves event detailing the proposals and understand there has been minor changes to the plan that appears to detail a very small reduction in the amount of Green Belt proposed to be taken, I do not think the proposals will mend the harm and impact that the amended proposals will have upon the environment and existing residents of Appleton, Stockton Heath and surrounding areas. I will turn a wonderful environment for people and wildlife, trees and plants and result in a polluted continuous traffic jam causing chaotic conditions for vehicles traveling in and out of Warrington, onto the surrounding motorways and through the country lanes surrounding the area.

How will these lanes support households that with teenagers in the family may have up to four cars in the family entering the road systems.

There will also be an impact on Warrington town centre in this regard.

My sister is a long term resident of Appleton and has made some points that I have discussed with her and found that I agree with every aspect of the points she has made that echo my thoughts rather more eloquently than I. However my own views upon these points are summarised as follows; although only a recent resident to the area, my experience of similar projects in Suffolk while working for the District Council have had extremely negative and damaging effects on the environment, devaluing properties, damaging the wildlife and polluting the environment in many ways including an inability to meet medical needs, social housing needs and inability of the country lanes to facilitate increased traffic having a polluting effect on the local environment. I see these mistakes echoed in this plan!

I strongly object to this Plan for the following reasons.

- The strategy does not seem to be based on accurately and objectively assessed needs; We cannot see how or where the proposed development properly takes into account what is happening in Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire. Residents of [REDACTED], many of whom are lifelong residents of [REDACTED] and due to frailty are unable to make their own statement are outraged and fail to understand the thinking behind the proposals - something we have debated in informal weekly meetings on this and other points, so I feel able to include their thoughts with my own objections.
- We are unable to see any clear evidence of justification for the predicted growth and no objectively demonstrated need for the volume of housing in this area, nor the need for the release of Green Belt land; This will be the beginning of the end of Green Belt spaces and the resulting destruction of wildlife habitation and its impact on the environment and mental health and welfare of existing and any future residents.

- The Plan is neither effective nor deliverable as it has no clear demonstration of how the already very poor and over-stretched transport infrastructure of South Warrington can possibly cope with the massively increased levels of traffic which would result from the increased housing and employment infrastructure proposed. It also does not clearly set out how the increased need for health, social, education and leisure services will be met and within what timescale;
- The Plan is not consistent with national policy as it does not deliver sustainable development – there would be harm to air quality and local ecology; it would massively increase the number of car journeys made on an inadequate road infrastructure. This is completely inconsistent with the Climate Change agenda of the UK. It also does not deliver a sufficient quantity of affordable housing.

I would like to suggest and request modifications to the Plan which would :

- Significantly reduce the number of houses proposed for South Warrington
- Take out any proposals for housing or employment infrastructure which would remove any part of the existing Green Belt, and instead look at more use of brownfield sites -of which there are still many- BEFORE any proposals for building on Green Belt that would set a precedent for future development and there will be no such thing as a Green Belt any more!
- Following discussions with long term residents of the area who have assisted me with their historic and long term experience and knowledge of the area that they have passed to me to enable me to experience the infrastructure and routes in and out of Warrington with the access dependent on bridges So.. there is a need to have a clear infrastructure delivery plan that addresses the need for routes from the South East of Warrington which do not rely on three decaying Victorian Swing Bridges and a single track crossing across the Bridgewater Canal over a dangerous narrow bridge in a residential area (Red Lane)
- Put forward a properly costed and funded plan to address existing problems of congestion and poor air quality now being experienced in Stockton Heath and Lower Walton, at Junction 20 of the M6, Junction 10 of the M56 and the hugely problematic and congested junction by the Cat and Lion on London Road.

Below I will set out in more detail my concerns and supporting evidence.

I have looked at the latest proposals that the Council has put forward very carefully and recently attended a consultation event at Wolves Stadium. As my sister is a long term resident of South Warrington and I gain important information from her experience and my more recent experience, it is my own and many others' considered view that the proposals are unsound and not fit for purpose. The even with recent revisions will completely change the area, and will destroy the nature of South Warrington and remaining open countryside. There are a number of key issues which are of major concern set out below.

Environment, Traffic Management and Air Quality

Some of the most important issues to me which have not been adequately or appropriately dealt with in the plan are **environment, traffic management and air quality**.

South Warrington is already choked with traffic. The air quality in Stockton Heath and along London Road is already extremely poor. There are constant queues through Stockton Heath, along London Road to the Motorway and on the roads leading from Grappenhall and Appleton Thorn. There is nowhere in the plan any indication of how increased traffic arising from so many additional houses would be managed; how the geography of South Warrington (two canals, one major, and a river) will be managed when the additional houses are built, or how the already existing severe difficulties would be mitigated.

How would South Warrington residents get into town or through town?

Existing Victorian bridge crossings are old, in poor condition and already choked with traffic, particularly if the swing bridges are raised or if there is a problem on the nearby motorway network. Any new roads indicated simply link to existing roads which are already totally choked.

The new bridge crossing which runs at the back of Centre Parks is causing major problems for Stockton Heath residents as there are now significant numbers of cars travelling along Red Lane, across a narrow one track bridge with poor visibility and through residential areas. This traffic is set to increase and cause further problems. This route is dangerous and has clearly not been thought through.

The new Plan still does not put forward any clear routes for new highways, motorway junctions or canal and river crossings which would be needed to serve the proposed development. This would still effectively block South Warrington residents from accessing facilities in the town centre or the north of the town. The area is already gridlocked – the existing infrastructure could not possibly cope with so many additional houses, generating thousands and thousands of more cars onto the road network.

Given the likely size and cost of the proposed houses it is highly unlikely that residents would use public transport, even if it existed (current public transport in the area is quite simply very poor).

Air Quality in South Warrington is already extremely poor

“The Plan still does not address the growing local and national concerns about the severe health hazard of air pollution.” Pollution in the area is already significant and additional traffic will only worsen it considerably. Warrington is surrounded by motorways. If the open countryside which currently exists is destroyed, the mitigating effect of the countryside on gases and particulates will be lost and pollution will increase. Despite the charm and facilities of Stockton Heath I for one, would not wish to live along the main road through the town, would you?

Impact on Key Services in the Area

If the number of houses proposed were built, there would be insufficient key services to support the local population. There is already significant pressure on services such as schools, GP surgeries, dentists and hospitals. It is totally unclear how these could be increased in the future.

The Plan predicts the need for more schools, medical facilities, shops etc. but there is no guarantee that these will be provided, when they will be provided, who will pay for them or how they will be staffed. Warrington Hospital is already stretched to breaking point and is in dire need of rebuilding. It is almost impossible to obtain dental services in the area even with the option of private treatment, appointments are difficult to obtain and the same with doctor services.

“Proposed Housing Numbers are still far too high and there is NO JUSTIFICATION for releasing Green Belt”

Green Belt land should only be released in exceptional circumstances. It appears to me that the use of the Green Belt land had been decided several years prior to the release of the plans and I hope that there will be enough recognition of the impact that will result if the plan goes ahead. Even the revised Plan does not show convincingly what the exceptional circumstances are to justify the development. More Brown Field sites are likely to be or become available and the Green Belt land is precious. We will never recover it once lost. In my view the environmental and ecological impact of the loss of Green Belt has not been properly assessed in the revised plan. It seems inconceivable that this plan should be implemented in view of the very recent climate conference in Glasgow - it may seem insignificant to the Council and developers but this development has long lasting and non reversible impact on our environment. If it goes ahead as I have said previously, it will set a precedent for more future developments, sweeping away the very principle of maintaining a Green Belt.

The Proposals are Undeliverable, Unrealistic and Unsound

The housing numbers which underpin the Plan are still way in excess of anything Warrington has achieved in the recent past and are not needed.

The poor traffic infrastructure and the geographical limitations of the area make the Plan simply undeliverable.

Loss of Character, Environment and Green Space

It is not a snobbery wanting to maintain a nice environment to live in, I nurture the wildlife in the surrounding land of my modest bungalow and am grateful for the opportunity to do so. But If the proposed developments go ahead, the whole character of South Warrington will be changed beyond recognition. Distinctive village communities will be subsumed into an urban mass and roads will be more choked and polluted than ever. Valuable environment will be spoiled and lost, and what is now a pleasant area to live in will no longer be so. The cruelly ousted wildlife will have nowhere to go, nothing to eat and plants and animals will be destroyed.

The plan would be a total disaster for South Warrington.

Not everyone with concerns is able to put them into response, but please be assured that all I have spoken to have grave worries about the impact of this plan. There is some feeling that the plan has been pre-decided and their objection is a '*waste of time*', a *poor* reflection of their faith in democracy! I can only hope that this is not the case and that reason will prevail. It will be a crime to inflict such damage to the Green Belt and to the quality of life in Stockton Heath and surrounding areas of South Warrington - the beginning of the end of the concept of green Belt. I can only hope that reason will prevail and that you will listen to the reason of informed local residents who have strong and reasoned objections to the idea!

Angela R Highton

Angelightona R H