

Response to Warrington Borough Council Proposed Submission Version Local Plan 2021 – 2038 Published September 2021

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I have re-read my response to the PDO/ Local Plan that I submitted just over 4 years ago. Frankly the majority of what I stated still applies to Warrington Borough Council's (WBC) latest Local Plan (LP). I almost feel it a waste of time giving my response again because the main issues raised by myself and others have not been addressed adequately. But here goes.

1. The latest LP version is striving for economic growth above all else and at an unrealistic level. I believe the focus of the LP should be primarily on sustainability and the quality of life it gives its residents and ratepayers and not on the constant drive for economic gain and growth. Developers and builders are only interested in profit and in the case of Homes England achieving their house building number targets, regardless of the impact on local communities, the environment and the critical state of the climate.

I do not believe that what is in the LP will solve the underlying problems of the poorer areas of Warrington or the shocking crime levels in the Borough - as evidenced by reports in the local press. Research has shown that in spite of what politicians think, the mindset that economic growth is the prime objective, has contributed to serious social and environmental problems, which have reduced living standards and specifically increased inequality and increased crime. The rich get richer, the poorer get poorer, and envy and greed leads to crime.

2. I remain strongly opposed to the release of anymore Green Belt especially in the South East Area. I do not believe the number of houses planned is necessary and question if these figures are realistic and up to date. If WBC is honest about protecting green belt until absolutely necessary, then there should be no release of green belt at all until all available brownfield sites have been filled with housing. It is the developers who are pushing WBC for their own interests, at the expense of existing Warrington residents.

What the LP contains will result in a total destruction of a valuable green environment asset for Warrington as a whole. The South East area was re-established as Green Belt only 7 years ago. I regularly walk and cycle on footpaths, trails and roads in the area and enjoy the wildlife I see. It is a major part of maintaining my physical and mental well-being. I live in Stockton Heath but there is nowhere in the area where I and my family can enjoy such open spaces – so I go “south” half a mile using “active travel”. In the years to come I am not going to carry out my current outdoor activities in this area if it is full of housing estates and local centres. Any so-called man-made country parkland will be small and too close to the built up developments. I will get in my car, “clog” the roads up further and drive out of the area for my exercise.

WBC needs to be more creative in looking for sites for development which avoids the need to destroy green spaces. For example, Warrington Town football club occupies land that could be used for residential purposes. They should be playing in somewhere like Victoria Park with

better facilities and with a car park that relieves the existing problem on match days of supporters' cars hindering access to and from the Cantilever Bridge.

As an occasional traveller through Warrington town centre, I observe lots of poor quality industrial buildings and sites used by businesses that could be more efficiently housed in modern buildings. It would lead to a freeing up of space for more central town housing and the elimination of awful looking sites which give a poor impression of the town centre. One example is the Evans House complex and nearby buildings.

3. The LP is far too ambitious and hence it will be unachievable in its time frame.

The LP is light on infrastructure plans as I will mention below, but any ideas for new developments are all very well and good but WBC is not even keeping up with the maintenance of the existing infrastructure.

When work is completed it might look good but the achievement of existing work is painfully slow and WBC's track record on this is poor. There are numerous local examples of new facilities/buildings and relatively minor infrastructure work taking ages to complete e.g. Great Sankey Leisure Centre, Dallam/Bewsey Hub, re-surfacing the TransPennine trail, Forge car park, and the current work at the Lumb Brook junction. Why are these projects taking so long from the identification of the need to completion? Is it shortage of money, labour resource or something else?

Productivity in the UK is pathetic compared with other advanced countries and projects are overly expensive. When I see one man digging a hole and three men watching him, or having a long tea break or texting, I despair. If building/road contractors are including this wasted time in their prices to the council then no wonder these projects are expensive. WBC and hence the ratepayer are being taken for a ride!

Funding is a major issue which will limit what can be achieved. WBC is constantly complaining about shortage of monetary support from central government. Even if WBC gets its wish to become a city additional funds emanating from that will not be enough to pay for what is in the plan – in addition to other demands not mentioned in the LP.

What will happen more quickly is house building, because that is what developers and builders want to boost their bottom lines.

4. The LP is lacking in any detail around road infrastructure to deal with the significant increased traffic particularly associated with the proposed South East Warrington Urban Extension. The public need to see what is proposed to deal with the vast increase amount of traffic associated with thousands of new houses, together with employees travelling into the new suburbs to schools, retail outlets etc plus van on-line deliveries, and no doubt buses. At present the LP says nothing about how it will deal with the north/south problem across the Bridgewater Canal. This is not acceptable.

To say that people will be encouraged to walk, cycle and use buses as a solution is a joke! Even WBC's own Local Transport "active travel" percentage increase targets are very modest. It will not happen in large numbers because of people's lifestyles and how they want and have to transport themselves and families to schools, dispersed work locations, extended family and to retail outlets. That is retail outlets whose goods are too big to be carried on buses and bikes! This is not the Netherlands. I wish it was. The British landscape and culture is sadly different. People will not get out of their cars in significant numbers in places like Warrington unless

there is a much more radical change to the infrastructure with much more attractive, flexible and low cost public transport together with forceful steps such as road closures. WBC has not got the funds and “bottle” to do this, so it needs to sort out the road system before attracting more cars onto the roads.

Developers will no doubt provide a road network in the immediate development area but they are not interested in what the “knock on” effects are. And the community infrastructure levy that WBC seeks to get from Developers is woefully inadequate to fund what is really required.

The LP contains a section on Transport Assessments and Travel Plans. I cannot see how these can be done when it will be impossible for developers or WBC to know what the actual pattern of transport residents will have. Very broad guesses will have to be made which could be far from reality. What is more the past record of WBC and other local authorities is that they still do not build the appropriate transport infrastructures in advance of the housing development taking place. This is true of medical centres and schools. That is why the public have no faith in local authorities!

Why does the LP say a “new or replacement bridge” for the Cantilever bridge? WBC should admit the existing bridge will remain because culturally it is one of the few Warrington historical structures remaining. Establishing a new bridge alongside the Cantilever Bridge is one thing but the LP does not say where the access roads will be leading to and from. From the Transport Safeguarding section, WBC has reserved land immediately on both side of the Manchester Ship Canal but not beyond. Does this mean it will only replace what the Cantilever does? That does nothing to deal with the real problem of north /south road network and crossing the Bridgewater Canal. Presumably that is not foreseen in the 18 year planning period. That spells a worsening of the chaotic current situation around Lumb Brook bridge.

5. I see no logic in totally withdrawing the residential allocations at the South West Urban Extension (1,600 homes), from the LP when this area will have a much better road infrastructure than the proposed South East Extension.

6. The aim to have affordable housing is admirable but this will be abused. What is occurring in reality is that existing once affordable housing is being developed and upgraded to such an attempt that selling prices are becoming ridiculously expensive and profiteering is rife.

Householders are understandably improving their existing properties and in many cases extending the size of them. Beyond that, what is happening in South Warrington, is that developers and builders are buying up smaller properties and doing massive extensions. Of course what they all do is hike up considerably the price of what other wise have been affordable housing. There are at least 3 examples in Grappenhall and Stockton Heath that I know of where modest bungalows suitable for older “downsizing” couples have been massively extended by developers. The price has gone from around £350k to over £800k. The developers will have achieved a huge profit and taken what were modest sized bungalows out of the reach of older couples and younger couples for that matter. WBC can do nothing about this yet it impacts affordability of the area considerably. The same will happen in time to new property initially sold at affordable prices.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion I do not believe the proposed LP is sound. There is no need for such large scale developments to take place when they will destroy valuable green belt in an area adjoining existing villages whose residents enjoy the open spaces and which has such an important environmental contribution at present. **The LP is unsound in that it fails to show enough detail of what infrastructure will adequately support the large population increase.** Furthermore I do not believe that what proposals the LP does contain are entirely achievable in the period covered, on financial and time grounds.