

# Objections to Warrington Borough Council, Local Plan Consultation, 2021

## Introduction

The Warrington Local Plan in effect transforms the green areas of Warrington into one huge urban sprawl. Despite very small pockets of 'green' on the proposed Local Plan 2021 such an action will alter Warrington forever and deny those from within and outside the borough a pleasant, health giving space to recharge after the stress of everyday life. Land farmed for hundreds of years will disappear forever closely followed by a severe diminution of wildlife and for some species total local annihilation. Noise, litter and air pollution produced as the result of the excessive house building in the green belt and proposed logistics hubs are of great concern especially as Warrington does not have a good record on air pollution already. It gives scant thought to the national reports on planning for the next few decades and fails to capitalise on some of its strongest assets, namely green belt and agricultural land, and for these reasons we consider the plan unsound.

The following points illustrate our objections:

### 1 Impact upon the Green Belt.

- **Loss of biodiversity** The proposed development greatly impinges on and compromises the green belt. The environmental and ecological impact of these proposals will have a devastating effect on biodiversity as a consequence of the loss of agricultural land and wildlife habitats. Substitution of mature trees, hedgerows and farmland with new and maintained plantings is not a viable option and would severely devastate wildlife habitats.
- The Biodiversity Metric 3.0, which measures the types and quality of different habitats, is due to come into force in two years' time. This means that when undertaking all new development in England developers will need to demonstrate that they will leave biodiversity better off than they found it. Biodiversity post-development must be at least 10% higher than the baseline assessment. Often developers will promise to deliver at least some of the required 'gains' into the future. But for example, in order to compensate for the immediate loss of some woodland, with woodland that will mature in thirty years' time, approximately three times the area being lost will be required (*British Wildlife 2021*). The same criteria will apply to other types of habitats and natural features (e.g. ponds, hedges). It is difficult to see how this can be achieved within the framework of WBC's proposed Local Plan 2021.
- Research by professional organisations has shown that increased lighting and the associated increase in light pollution is harmful to many invertebrates and other nocturnal wildlife. (*Butterfly conservation*, *Centre for Ecology and Hydrology and Newcastle University*)
- The *Institute of Public Policy Research* has already stated. "The UK...is described as one of the most nature depleted countries in the

world". Thus, we should be protecting rather than creating maintained and unnatural areas once the original wildlife has been tragically expunged.

- One of the purposes of the green belt is to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment and therefore abandonment of this principle is an unsound proposal on the part of Warrington Borough Council.

**Loss of good grade agricultural land.** Under Warrington's revised Local Plan large areas of good grade agricultural land (some of the best in England) would be destroyed. Events following Brexit and Covid 19 together with Climate Change have highlighted the need for more food production in the UK itself. The developments proposed in the Local Plan, both in terms of housing and logistic hubs, would destroy more of the productive areas which should be the 'bread basket of Warrington'. Growing locally negates the need for much of the transportation of produce which requires large lorries which increase traffic congestion and pollution.

- Grassland itself is very effective in trapping carbon dioxide.
- *Ecotricity* has begun work on its first green gas mill (near Reading) using grass to make natural gas as a viable alternative to conventional fossil fuel gas. In this way marginal grassland can be used to power homes. ([Ecotricity.co.uk/green-gas-report](http://Ecotricity.co.uk/green-gas-report)).

## **2 Pollution and congestion.**

- Current infrastructure is incapable of managing the proposed development. Excessive house building and proposed logistics hubs would encourage more vehicles on the residential roads of South Warrington e.g. Grappenhall, Thelwall and Stockton Heath. The rush hour, the school run, the periodic closure of both the M6 and M56 as a result of accidents and traffic volume, together with the closure of the three swing bridges across the Manchester Ship Canal, results in near gridlock in the whole area and will only get worse. Already the local roads have become 'rat runs' with vehicle emissions being the main source of pollution. Litter problems and hazardous failure to adhere to speed limits exacerbate the situation. Increasing road traffic is inconsistent with proposed climate change solutions. These only serve to show the unsound nature of the proposed plan.

## **3 Employment**

- A significant part of green belt would be lost to proposed logistics sites (eg. Six:56). Typical of this type of warehouse development would be low paid employment with much of the workforce needing to be sourced from outside the area e.g. St Helens and Widnes. This would further contribute to the already existing traffic emission pollution and

vehicle congestion. Other vacant industrial sites in Warrington should be considered.

#### **4 Urban sprawl**

- The amount of greenbelt land which would still be required for the revised Local Plan proposals is deplorable. Within a few years the linear development, which greenbelt was designed to prevent, will have engulfed the whole of the outskirts of Warrington.
- Only seven years ago Warrington Borough Council's green belt boundary was confirmed within a twenty year plan. This advanced planning is problematic. Instead, planning for the next ten to fifteen years should require less or no green belt release. Most of the new housing will be unaffordable for local people and affordable homes need to be situated near to appropriate facilities and communication hubs. As it stands the revised Local Plan is unsound .

#### **5 Countryside health benefits.**

- There should be a greater focus on the benefits which the countryside brings to mental and physical health. Only three years ago *Natural England* highlighted the benefits of 'green care' and quoted that in any one year at least 1 in 4 people will experience a 'significant' mental health problem. These problems will have been exacerbated by the current Covid 19 pandemic.
- The Revised Local Plan highlights yet again the national crisis facing the countryside and the strongest possible case should be made for countryside protection and enhancement, as promulgated by the *Campaign to Protect Rural England*.

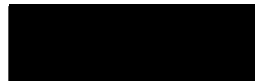
#### **Conclusion**

The Revised Local Plan as a whole contradicts all the criteria for a green belt. A clear and well defined local plan covering infrastructure, transport, realistic population growth ,employment and housing needs should be addressed. With so many poorly defined and generalised sections the Revised Local Plan is unrealistic, unsound and should be reviewed again.

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11<sup>th</sup>. November 2021