



Longbarn Residents Association

Representing Anderson Close, Blackburne Close, Burnet Close, Carpenter Grove, Church Drive, Fallowfield Grove, Guildford Close, Peasley Close, Oxmead Close, Duckworth Grove, Freshfields Drive, Lovage Close, Pasture Lane, Mullion Grove, Mayberry Grove, Saffron Close, Sage Close, Sorrel Close, Station Road South and West View.

Registered Charity – 1170309

Dear Sir/Madam,

22nd September 2017

RE: WBC LOCAL PLAN, “Preferred Development Option” Consultation

Longbarn Residents Association (LRA) is pleased to provide a response to your Local Plan: “Preferred Development Option” (PDO) consultation. Our Association has over 2,500 members and represents the interests of residents in a wide range of matters such as local planning & development, traffic and parking, maintenance of trees, shrubs and bushes, communal local facilities, control of litter and nuisance, and the general improvement of the Longbarn Area. LRA provides free membership to all local residents, and relies on their support in order to succeed. LRA strives hard to promote inclusivity in all areas of its work, including the many social and leisure activities it provides. As an organisation LRA is proud to have been awarded Charitable Status (Registered 1170309) and to be sponsored by the National Lottery and a number of other local businesses.

Since it was set up in 2012 a significant number of issues LRA has tackled, have stemmed from increased pressures placed on our local infrastructure as the town expands and encourages more residents and businesses into the area. We welcome then this opportunity of commenting on the Council’s ambitious plans to significantly expand its size in the hope that they will not just improve the quality of life and ensure the prosperity of Warrington’s residents and workforce in the future, but also resolve some of the serious traffic congestion problems that we face every day as we fulfil our daily tasks on the North-East side of Warrington where Longbarn is situated.

The PDO document has been discussed by our committee at a formal meeting, and our draft response drawn up by one of our members who had the time available to research detailed points underpinning the document and also to attend the Birchwood public “drop in” consultation event and discuss the plans with Council representatives. This response document has been formally approved by LRA’s committee and reflects the views of us all.

Summary of Comments and Conclusions

- In general terms LRA considers the PDO document thorough and robust. The underpinning arguments appear (to non-specialist readers) to be well-founded and drawn from a wide range of appropriate sources in almost all sections.
- The association fully agrees with the Local Plan Objectives when considered as an entity, but we have very significant concerns that expansion and development on this scale without an adequate transport infrastructure scheme will provide a recipe for chaos and this matter has coloured the tone of many of our more detailed responses.
- The assessment of the available options is well-conducted. LRA supports the recommended Preferred Development Option and agrees this provides the best way forward for the future growth of Warrington.
- We recognise with regret that the release of green belt land to housing is inevitable in the current planning context. We agree that the structured release of land as set out in the PDO has the potential to best realise the Local Plan Objectives. We also accept the argument that the greater scope of development operations can better release the resources to finance the required infrastructure.
- However, insufficient references are made in the PDO to the way new highway and transport initiatives are to be put in place to convince LRA that the Objectives can be effectively realised. Few examples are provided about the way transport corridors through and around the town are to be developed, and the supporting highway plan is vague (figure 10).
- In progressing to the draft Local Plan we strongly recommend that the Council develops a strategic and comprehensive road and traffic scheme and integrates this more effectively into the discussion. The Prioritisation of road network access served Warrington well as a developing New Town forty years ago, we think it is equally important today if the town is to successfully regenerate and refigure itself into a sustainable New City. To match the ambitious housing and employment plans, equally ambitious highway schemes need to be demonstrably in place for the whole town, and for these to be fully implemented.
- LRA will continue to consider and evaluate the Council's proposals regarding its Local Plan. We reserve the right to make further comments in future, as our understanding develops and more information becomes available.

Please consider our more detailed response comments to your specific consultation questions below, where we include particular points for your consideration

Responses to Consultation Questions

Q1) Do you have any comments to make about how we've worked out the need for new houses and employment land in Warrington over the next 20 years.

Yes. A clear argument is made in the PDO, that is also well supported in the guidance provided in "the frequently asked questions" notes.

Q2) Do have any comments to make about how we've worked out the number of homes and amount of employment land that can be accommodated within Warrington's existing built up areas.

Yes. This topic is potentially of great significance to us as it relates to proposals that are closest to our homes. Unfortunately, we find the section beginning Maximising Urban Capacity (4.8) impenetrable. This is partly because the link to the promised "updated urban capacity statement" (4.9) did not take us to the correct document. This will have prevented even the most expert reader understanding how the development figures are arrived at. It

would seem best to consider expanding discussion of this important section, which contributes a significant number of new homes to the PDO.

Q3) Have we appropriately worked out the amount of land to be released from the Green Belt including the amount of land to be “safeguarded”?

Yes, the case for exceptional release of Green Belt is well presented, on the assurance that the amended green belt boundaries will then endure for a significant period beyond the terms of the plan. The calculations underpinning the release of the land that is then safeguarded for development seem appropriate.

It is only with great reluctance that LRA can support the idea of releasing any green-belt land (or green field land that is not formally within the green belt such as at Peel Hall). However, the consequences of not doing so are very well set out in paragraphs 4.41. and 4.42. Of these, the negative impact of piecemeal infrastructure development on the quality of life and business opportunities in the town is most persuasive.

Q4) Do you agree with the Local Plan Objectives?

Yes. The Association supports the Local Plan for the transition of Warrington from “New Town to New City” through regeneration of the inner town, the creation of “new sustainable neighbourhoods” and the strategic expansion of existing areas.

However, we have significant doubts that the target to deliver over 22,000 new homes in the next twenty years is *actually* achievable. In our view, the success of the whole Plan hinges on the effective delivery of objective W4 “to provide new infrastructure to support Warrington’s growth, reduce congestion and promote sustainable transport options etc.

Indeed, if this objective is not fully met, we think the town will come to a grinding halt.

Transport Infrastructure is not sufficiently developed elsewhere in the PDO and we are most concerned that this area be fully considered and incorporated appropriately in the Draft Local Plan. Currently the lives of Longbarn residents are adversely affected as they go about their daily business by the severe traffic congestion in peak hours on Harpers Road/Station Road, as traffic uses the route as “a rat run” to avoid the traffic gridlock that occurs daily at the College Place roundabout. In our view this matter, will not be resolved by the installation of yet another set of traffic lights, but only by the wholesale adoption of the flyover that was originally intended for the expressway at this point when the New Town was planned over forty years ago.

5) Do you have any comments to make about how we’ve assessed different “spatial options” for Warrington’s future development?

Yes. From the information provided paragraph 4.52, Option 2 (the scheme which includes much of green built area release being adjacent to the existing urban area and allows only incremental growth in outlying villages) provides the best way forward for the town and has the highest potential for the achievement of Local Plan objectives.

6) Do you have any comments to make about how we’ve assessed different options for the main development locations?

Yes. The process of identifying available locations seems thorough and the conclusions drawn from the assessment logical. We are satisfied that 4.64 Option 2 (incorporating a Garden City of 6000 homes) is the most appropriate. We support the argument that this will generate a firmer financial base to support the underpinning infrastructure.

7) Do you agree with our Preferred Development Option for meeting Warrington’s future development needs?

Yes. LRA considers that the Preferred Development Option identifying four main areas of growth, and allowing some incremental growth in the surrounding villages provides the best

way forward for Warrington. While this approach does require significant release of Green Belt land, the document attempts to make clear it also facilitates developing the most comprehensive plan to secure the wider highways infrastructure required to address existing congestion.

LRA were pleased to note the general comment made to the significant investment being made in highways infrastructure (5.7). This seems essential to us to secure the well-being and prosperity of Warrington's existing (let alone future) residents and work-force. A significant initiative in this respect is the proposed "Western link", which should help to relieve the congestion of the town centre.

Other transport/highway initiatives referred in the PDO are extremely vague and unconvincing, as is apparent in Figure 10 with its flourish of curving purple arrows leading to nowhere, and which certainly do not provide a meaningful "summary of key transport proposals", as promised in paragraph 5.7.

At this stage in outlining overall development options we can see why perhaps it is important to retain some looseness and flexibility with road and highway plans. However, there are other worrying signs that the necessary major highway infrastructure proposals are not yet fully fledged. This is exemplified, for instance, in reference being made to a possible new canal crossing in the "Frequently Asked Questions" (*which is badly needed*), but which is not included in the PDO. In progressing to the Draft Local Plan stage, it is essential that the Council demonstrates a strategic approach to highways infrastructure and that clear plans are in place to develop adequate transport corridors from north to south, from east to west around or through the town that feed onto motorways and across the ship canal. Please note this cannot be done by simply updating projects in the Infrastructure Development Plan (See para 5.21).

8) Do you have any comments to make about our Preferred Development Option for the City Centre

Yes. The masterplan for the regeneration of the town centre appears well-founded and the trajectory of housing development and use of employment land seems appropriate. It will be clear from our previous comments that we support here the Council's "strong commitment to improve the strategic transport connections" to other places (para 5.16) and the recognition that this requires "major infrastructure investment" (5.17) and not simply the installation of "smart" traffic lights on existing roads, roundabouts and junctions to improve the traffic flow.

LRA are surprised to find that the land for Peel Hall development proposals, which have currently been rejected by WBC are being incorporated here and apparently buried within the Wider Urban Area proposals and development figures. This is a matter of some concern to us, but we are confident that this matter will be addressed by other respondents. At this point we think it important to focus on the comments regarding the development of the Peel Hall area in paragraph 5.22 which are: "there is also the need for major transport improvements to ensure the site can be developed". In our view the remarks (offered with regard to a relatively small development of some 1,200 houses in relation to the PDO scheme as a whole) epitomise our own concerns regarding the need to develop adequate transport corridors to support the successful delivery of the Local Plan.

9) Do you have any comment about our Preferred Development Option for developing the Warrington Waterfront?

No. This is an interesting scheme effectively explained.

10) Do you have any comments about our Preferred Development Options for the Warrington Garden City Suburb?

No. This is an interesting scheme effectively explained.

11) Do you have any comments to make about our Preferred Development Option for the South Western Urban Extension?

No. This is an interesting scheme effectively explained.

12) Do you have any comment about our Preferred Development Option for development in the outlying settlements?

Yes. We fully support the Council's decision to hold back detailed site assessment work and confirm specific sites until a later stage in completing the Local Plan. We are pleased to note the way this may enable respective Parish Councils to participate in the decision-making process should they choose to draw up their own Neighbourhood Plans and express the preferences of their own communities.

In our view use of the term "outlying settlements" throughout the document is unhelpful to non-specialists. Would it not be more user friendly to speak of "surrounding villages"? If this change cannot be permitted for technical reasons the phrase should be included in the Local Plan Glossary document.

13) Do you agree with our approach to providing new Employment land?

Yes, the rationale for the approach seems entirely logical.

14) Do you agree with our suggested approach for dealing with Gypsy and Travellers and Travelling show-people sites?

Yes. Longbarn has seen at first hand the damage that can be brought about by the illegal trespass of travellers on community land, and we recognise the difficulties of accommodating this group appropriately in the area. We think the pragmatic approach taken in releasing unauthorised sites from the green-belt to make up some of the permanent allocation for this group to be very sensible. However, before proceeding to the Draft Local Plan, we suggest that the document is revised to ensure that unintended offence is not created by comment on this group of people being set in very close proximity to references to "minerals and waste", as occurs in paras 2.32. (bullet 6) and 4.4.

15) Do you agree with our suggested approach for dealing with Minerals and Waste?

Yes, the approach seems very practical and to be fully in keeping with the requirements.

16) Having read the Proposed Development Option Document is there anything else you feel we should include with the Local Plan?

Yes. From our earlier comments relating to questions 4,7 and 8 above, it will be apparent that LRA requires a full exposition of the transport and highway infrastructure plans supporting Warrington's expansion to be in place and included in the Draft Local Plan. This we consider essential if the Local Plan Objectives are to be effectively met, and if you wish to continue to enjoy the support of local residents such as ourselves.

Yours Faithfully,

