

Further response to some aspects of the Warrington Borough Council, Preferred Development Option in South Warrington

Introduction

The Preferred Development Option in effect transforms the green areas of Warrington into one huge urban sprawl. Despite very small pockets of 'green' on the plans such an action will alter Warrington forever, deny those from within and outside the borough a pleasant, health giving space to recharge after the stress induced by the concrete jungles. Land farmed for hundreds of years will disappear forever closely followed by a severe diminution of wildlife and for some species total local annihilation. It gives scant thought to the latest national reports on planning³ for the next few decades, expunges a national initiative^{Item}⁴ and fails to capitalise on some of its strongest assets.

The following points enumerate some of our many concerns:

- 1. Garden cities.** Ebenezer Howard (1850 – 1928) the originator of this concept envisaged a self-sustaining community with zones to separate functions. Thus the residential areas could be supported by separate areas for industry to provide employment and engender economic success. All this was to be created within an agricultural setting to feed the community. Garden suburbs were designed to be on a smaller scale but became nothing more than parts of larger conurbations. This was the antithesis of Howard's self-sustaining principles. It is therefore a misnomer to refer to Warrington's proposed development as a garden city because the agricultural land would disappear. What is planned in the case of Warrington Garden City is the urbanisation of most of the food producing land in the area.
- 2. Infra structure.** Current infra structure is incapable of managing the proposed development. Further development of the *Barley Castle Industrial Estate* would encourage more vehicles on the residential roads of Grappenhall, Thelwall and Stockton Heath. During the rush hour, the school run and the periodic closure of both the M6 and M56, as a result of accidents and traffic volume, near gridlock ensues in the whole area and will only get worse. Already the local roads have become 'rat runs' with concomitant pollution, litter problems and hazardous failure to adhere to speed limits. One solution would be to develop a residential area adjacent to the businesses in the Barley Castle area of the old *Stretton Airfield*; a brown field site which would not impinge on the greenbelt and would reduce the volume of traffic passing through the aforementioned residential districts. *Fiddlers Ferry* is also due to be de-commissioned. Could this brown field site be used for development thus saving virgin green sites?
- 3 Ecology.** When questioned at the Consultation held at the *Park Royal Hotel* in Stretton, we were informed by one of the planners that a full ecological survey had not been undertaken. Surely this should have been done to ascertain the presence of mature trees and hedgerows, the sites of old buildings and hollow trees for bat roosts,

the number of ponds for amphibians, uncommon and rare plant species etc. Loss of habitat is of paramount concern. Removal of historic hedgerows and mature trees would minimise the availability for wild life. Substitution by new plantings is not a viable option and would severely compromise wildlife habitats. As an example the following is a short list of the role of some of our existing mature tree and hedge species e.g.

- Birch (*Betula*) supports about 229 species of insects
- Hawthorn (*Crataegus*) supports about 149 species of insects
- Oak (*Quercus*) supports about 284 species of insects¹

Simon Clulow of the University of Newcastle, commented on the effects of relocation in a recent report: "While animals are spared a socially unacceptable death of being crushed under a bulldozer, they then perish out of sight.

"We are approving developments upon mitigation strategies that are flawed. If this isn't managed well, it contributes to species decline and ultimately risks extinctions." While this refers to worldwide issues as well as those in the UK, it nevertheless is meaningful at the local level.²

- 4 The Trans Pennine Trail.** The coast to coast Trans Pennine Trail as part of the European Walking Route 8 and the National Cycle Network Route 62 forms an amazingly level trail across the country for people to experience the benefits of walking, cycling and running. It does not discriminate against those in wheelchairs or pushchairs or those who can only walk a short distance. It provides a green space for those who may only experience a concrete environment during the rest of the week. It introduces children to aspects of wildlife and does not depend on a deep pocket in order to participate. It is truly egalitarian.

A concerted effort of the *Millennium Fund*, the *Heritage Lottery Fund*, the *European Union*, *DEFRA* and many others contributed to the raising of £60,000,000 to finance this route, yet Warrington Borough Council seems determined to challenge all these authorities, expunge the Warrington section, forget all the hard work in establishing and initiating this project and deprive people of a free life enhancing amenity.

- 5 Greenbelt.** The amount of greenbelt land which would be required for the current 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. A higher density of housing may be more appropriate, especially smaller dwellings for single people, first time buyers or those wishing to downsize.
- 6 Countryside health benefits.** There should be a greater focus on the benefits which the countryside brings to mental and physical health. Only last year *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 problem³. The Warrington 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*.

- 7 **Integrated approach to land use.** A report, *The Best Use of UK Agricultural Land*,¹ has been produced by the University of Cambridge hosting a [Natural Capital Leaders Platform](#) in collaboration with Asda, Sainsbury's, Nestlé, BOCM PAULS, AB Agri, Yara, BASF, and Volac, as well as the National Farmers' Union (NFU) and the Country Land and Business Association. The aim was to understand the amount of additional land needed, and provide a simple, clear vision for UK agricultural land use alongside a set of principles to guide future decision-making. The report states that:

“By 2030, the UK could require up to 7 million hectares of additional land to meet a growing population's food, space and renewable energy needs, while increasing the area needed to protect nature and its services, a new report coordinated by the Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (CISL) has warned. This represents more than 35% of the UK's existing agricultural land, and compares with up to 5 million hectares that might be released from a range of potential supply side initiatives.

Andrew Montague-Fuller, Programme Manager at CISL, and author of the report said: “In this initial analysis, we identified a significant gap between additional land demand and potential supply, as well as a worrying lack of clarity about what agricultural land is expected to deliver. It is clear that more research is needed, and that business, government, farmers, and landowners need to work together to ensure we can meet these growing demands, while also protecting the environment.”

Andy Richardson, Head of Corporate Communications at Volac, said: “I hope the vision proposed in this report is a catalyst for greater action and integrated thinking on land use. Lack of leadership in this area has the potential to compromise our future food and energy security. We should take the opportunity to join up thinking between Industry and Government by building on this report's analysis to develop a decision making framework and an action plan.”⁴



Sources

1. [http://www.britishecologicalsociety.org/100papers/100 Ecological Papers/100 Influen_tial Papers_055.pdf](http://www.britishecologicalsociety.org/100papers/100_Ecological_Papers/100_Influen_tial_Papers_055.pdf)
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/jan/23/relocation-of-animals-could-drive-some-species-towards-extinction-study>
3. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/connecting-with-nature-offers-a-new-approach-to-mental-health-care>
4. <http://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/two-million-hectare-shortfall-in-uk-land-possible-by-2030-study-finds>