

Dear Sirs

Warrington Borough Council Local Plan Consultation

I wish to comment on the on the “Preferred Development Option” for Warrington Borough to be delivered over the next 20 years.

I make the comments as a resident of the Grappenhall conservation area for the last ■ years and for whom the proposed development will mean a very substantial change in the living environment. I recognise that development of land already in public ownership is an inevitability and this has been the case for many years and is reluctantly accepted.

I am using your “Preferred Development Option – Consultation (July 2017) as the source document. In the first instance I must complain most strongly about the quality of maps and plans. They are of such poor resolution that it is impossible to clearly view your proposals in relation to the existing environment.

The proposed new “Garden City” development as proposed in the SWUE Framework Plan of June 2017 is on a different scale and involves the removal of Green Belt and Protected Status from a considerable area of land. This proposal is put forward despite the following condition outlined in the Government 2017 White Paper “Fixing Our Broken Housing Market”. This makes a policy statement of:

*Maintaining existing strong protections for the Green Belt, and clarifying that Green Belt boundaries should be amended only **in exceptional circumstances** when local authorities can demonstrate that they have fully examined all other reasonable options for meeting their identified housing requirements;*

Your proposals pay scant regard to these guidelines and the only reference to local employment is a modest extension to the existing Appleton/Barleycastle employment area which is predominantly warehousing and distribution orientated.

The SWUE Framework Plan indicates limited employment areas but not on a scale that would absorb up to 12,000 people. The proximity of the development to the Motorway network provides access to employment areas in either of the major cities within easy reach, with the risk of the Garden City becoming a dormitory suburb of Manchester and Liverpool. It should be noted that the M56 is already heavily congested at peak times.

The SWUE Framework Plan does not put forward any case for development on Green Belt land which conforms to White Paper policy. The proposals as they stand are completely unjustified.

The Plan along with other reviews undertaken by Warrington Borough Council have highlighted the inadequate infrastructure to support such development. The proposals for improvements recognise this fact but lack any substantive detail.

Historically the Borough developed in 2 parts, firstly the original Warrington town and secondly the southerly Cheshire Villages and rural area. It is well known that 2 water features create a natural boundary between North and South Warrington and crossing points have not been substantially improved since the 1930s and the Ship Canal crossings were designed and built primarily for horse and cart.

The Preferred Development Option brings into sharp focus a third obstacle between north and south Warrington namely the Bridgewater Canal. Even without further development in the Appleton Area there is considerable infrastructure "stress". Traffic from this area has either to turn right onto the A49 Trunk road and contribute to congestion in Stockton Heath or squeeze through the Lumbrook Canal under bridge and then pass over the weight restricted Cantilever Bridge. All other bridges over the Bridgewater Canal are either weight or width restricted, with the exception of the A50 on the Eastern border of Proposed Development.

Public Transport too is heavily focused north of the Ship Canal. Whilst the town has excellent rail connections to all major commercial and industrial centres in the UK, they can only be accessed in the north of the Borough by negotiating 3 limited water crossings. Warrington bus services are unreliable south of the river and for this reason may not be well utilised. A potentially valuable public transport route in the south of the Borough is the old rail route to Altrincham. Restoration of this route into a tramway would provide a vital link from Warrington Bank Quay to the city of Manchester as well as the airport. In a time of rapidly changing transport technology there is no recognition of this and the transport planning models seem wedded to old fashioned and outdated technology.

On a particular point it is noted that Broad Lane and Stockton Lane should form part of a bus route. This will never happen without major investment in road widening as well as realignment and does not take into account school traffic which even now can bring traffic to a standstill.

Government planning policy now proposes that local communities should be more involved in the planning process, in a positive way. Despite the Parish of Grappenhall & Thelwall being significantly affected there has been no local presentation. It is understood that lack of adequate facilities was the reason, a closer study would have highlighted at least 3 suitable venues.

The SWUE Framework Plan should present Warrington with a golden opportunity to develop a cohesive plan that will enable the area to overcome its historic divisions and become a dynamic part of the developing "Northern Powerhouse". Local transport and infrastructure play an essential part of this plan and must be in place before all else. Communities must be involved, not just in the broad plan but also in the details.

In summary, the Preferred Development Option for the Garden City Suburb is a dream with no solid foundation and one that proposes the plunder of valued green belt land for no justifiable purpose.

In summary, the proposed plan is inappropriate for the following reasons:

The justification for the development of Green Belt and Protected Status does not meet "White Paper" criteria.

A development of this scale is going to need infrastructure investment of significant scale. There is no clear indication of how this will be funded and when it will take place.

There is no recognition of the inevitable damage to the highly visible rural landscape, this being the highest point in the Borough.

There has been no appropriate involvement of the Grappenhall community.

I await publication of the results of the consultation process with interest.

Yours faithfully

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