

Local Plan Review - comments on the Preferred Development Option (PDO) for south Warrington

Summary:

Warrington Borough Council's initial Local Plan 'evidence base' was formulated with an input of *only* 78 responses, it would appear mostly by developers and landowners who do not live in the area and are concerned only with profit. It has not been led by the community and the Council has formulated a plan with the primary intention of increasing the population of Warrington, not with improving the quality of life of the people who are already resident in the town.

The PDO is imbalanced. It says much about south Warrington 'development', but little about improving the urban environment in north Warrington (including the town centre), an area that continues to deteriorate. A Local Plan should focus on improving quality, bringing the town's communities together and not accommodating urban sprawl driven, seemingly, by the desire to increase the Council's revenues from taxation of new developments and their inhabitants. Because of the lack of consultation in formulating the plan Warrington's existing residents are placed in the deleterious position of being objectors rather than contributors to the development of their town.

The short period available for consultation was deliberately chosen to run across summer holidays when many people are away from the area. The draft proposals and the nature of their presentation to the public have the appearance of being set in stone. Warrington residents have been treated with contempt by Warrington Borough Council (WBC).

Specific objections:

1. The people of Warrington should be informed of the identity of all those who will gain or profit from the PDO, so their views can be fully interpreted in the context of their interests. This should include councillors, corporate and non-corporate functionaries and decision makers. Councillors and officers should disclose any positions and relationships, both informal and formal, which they have with any person or organisations likely to benefit in any way from the proposals. Failure to do so suggests the consultation exercise is little more than a sham to satisfy planning requirements.

2. The failure of the Local Plan proposals to address the largest challenge facing Warrington is appalling. Warrington town centre has become a dismal collection of faded streets and a mishmash of ill-considered initiatives with no evident coherent strategy. The Local Plan claims to 'secure high-quality design and reinforce character and local distinctiveness...'. However, WBC has difficulty in demonstrating sufficiently this ambition or capability. The quality of the new developments in the town centre and of development control and enforcement have not harmonised with the traditional historic character and scale, for example shed shops along Winwick Road and in Cockhedge, poor shop fronts of Bridge Street, Dial Street, Church Street, Orford Lane, Lovely Lane, and Padgate Lane.

There are NO existing or proposed conservation areas indicated for the City centre. Does Warrington have nothing worthy of preservation?

3. Details of the huge traffic / transport implications for Warrington have been omitted from the Local Plan because no detailed traffic computer models appear to have been tested for the road network. The implications for south Warrington, north Warrington and, in focus, Latchford and west Thelwall are appalling. Existing roads and routes will experience significantly increased traffic congestion and pollution. The quality of life for existing residents will significantly reduce as a consequence. On Monday 4th September 2017 at the Park Royal exhibition, Mr Farrell advised that no detailed transportation / traffic model had been prepared for the proposals, but was

commencing. Thus, there is no detailed transportation / traffic / road infrastructure chapter in the report, nor evidence of any computer modelling and analysis of the environmental, road widening or social impact of this 'development' plan throughout the borough. To present a PDO to the public without this essential work is not only half-baked, but shows a distinct contempt for the "little people" who live in the town, some of whom have the dubious privilege of paying Council Tax to support those Council employees who treat them with such contempt.

New housing population will create even more intense traffic congestion and pollution throughout the town thereby negating any benefit that may accrue from the proposed western by-pass to the town centre. The draft proposals for Warrington require more disruptive road widening and engineering works to accommodate increased traffic. North – south traffic movement will considerably increase the current significant pressure on the rural lanes of south Warrington and on protected Heritage Assets on the Bridgewater Canal which will most likely 'require' their demolition or significant alteration. The Bridgewater Canal and the Manchester Ship Canal are a considerable impediment to north – south traffic movement. All of Warrington's rail services are based north of these canals, while the housing developments are south of them. The PDO's concept of improving communications by using an old railway bridge and then dumping the traffic in Latchford demonstrates how ill-considered this proposal is.

There is no evidence that bus companies and operators have been consulted or that public transport has been included as part of the integral infrastructure.

Because of the southern location of the proposed housing adjacent to the M56, the incoming 'residents' will often not be employed in Warrington; they will use the M56 and M62 to work elsewhere. Where is the evidence that clearly demonstrates Warrington's economy will create jobs for people living in the proposed developments? Warehousing suggested by the PDO does not generate significant employment, and will create even less in the future as fully automated warehouses become the norm. More likely, the proposed, so called "Green", southern housing developments of Warrington will function as suburbs to Manchester, Liverpool and Chester, and increase pollution by encouraging long-distance car-based commuting to these cities. However the developments will function as a source of Council Tax income for WBC, and this is the primary motivation for the poorly considered PDO.