

Firstly, it is pleasing to see the council dedicating such effort to the ongoing success of Warrington and some elements of the local plan preferred development option will clearly be beneficial – notably much-needed town centre regeneration and the opening up of the waterfront area.

As a resident living on the Stockton Heath / Grappenhall border, I am most familiar with the nature and needs of my local community. As such, the areas of the local plan where I have greatest comment and concern relate to development plans in the south of Warrington. I agree with need for development, in terms of housing, infrastructure, employment land and local facilities to support the success and ongoing improvement of Warrington, but not at the magnitude proposed in the current plan. As such, the main areas that I wish to provide feedback on relate to the scale of planned development in the south-east Warrington area and the impact this will have on local communities and their environment.

In my opinion, the proposed level of home building in the south east would dramatically transform the existing areas, and runs the risk of having a significant negative impact on these areas. Based on the 2015 Ward profiles, the entirety of the southern Wards of Grappenhall and Thelwall (~4000 households), Stockton Heath (~3000 households) and Appleton (~4000 households) represents approximately 11,000 households. Ignoring the planned south-west Warrington urban extension adjacent to Walton, the proposed 'Garden City Suburb' involves building over 7000 new houses, which is the equivalent of adding another Stockton Heath and another Appleton to the area, with the threat of future building in the vicinity in the 'Safeguarded Land' immediately adjacent to Thelwall, which would further impact the local environment and community. The inclusion of some mitigating strategies (e.g. green buffers, off-set development to the Bridgewater canal and inclusion of a country park) is encouraging, but does not allay concerns over the impact of the proposed level of building. A more sensitive and proportionate scale of building would be preferred. In no order, my main concerns with such growth are around negative impact on:

- i. Vibrancy of existing communities (e.g. negative impact on the Stockton Heath village centre in terms of traffic levels and on the historic environment of Grappenhall village);
- ii. Ease of access of the countryside (without having to drive) – currently easy, but more challenging if the green belt land around Grappenhall village, Grappenhall Heys and Appleton largely disappears;
- iii. Unsustainability of increased demand on already stretched local services (e.g. health services);
- iv. Volume of traffic and increase in congestion and journey time – I fail to see how any infrastructure improvements will be able to cope with a near doubling of the number of households south of the ship canal, even with the possibility of two new crossings (Western link and tentative high-level proposal), given there are already four busy crossings and the newly proposed crossings will also be serving other expanding areas (e.g. the Waterfront and town centre).

In principle, I disagree with the proposed strategy underpinning the current development concept, namely that of focusing green belt release on areas near existing urban areas, as this has greatest impact on sizeable local communities (i.e. Grappenhall, Appleton, Stockton Heath, and Grappenhall Heys) and runs counter to the primary purpose of green belt, which is to control urban growth and prevent urban sprawl. I would suggest that it would be more appropriate to focus building on the outlying areas of Warrington, such as around Hatton, Hollins Green and north of the M62 (e.g. near New Lane End, Hermitage Green, and Burtonwood) where impact of green belt release would be lessened (fewer people currently living in proximity to those areas), where existing infrastructure would be more easily upgraded, and where strong links already exist to the wider road network.

Proposed development in these areas is currently limited. This approach would seem to be more consistent with 'option 5' in the development options section of the local plan document, which seems to have been largely dismissed, despite many positives for this option being noted in the area profiles and options assessment technical notes. I would encourage the council to give more consideration to this option and to better explore how the potential negatives of this option could be addressed.

In addition, I object to the rationale for green belt release described in the current plan. The plan (section 4.40) suggests that release of green belt land is justified to '...enable the creation of new sustainable communities but in a manner which will unlock strategic infrastructure to support the growth of Warrington as a whole, addressing existing issues of congestion and unlocking major development sites with significant brownfield capacity.' I do not believe that the current plan 'unlocks strategic infrastructure' given the lack of any significant detail on infrastructure (road/rail/bus route) projects within the south of Warrington, with the exception of the two ship canal crossings, both of which can be achieved without the release of green-belt land, or with limited release at the most. In contrast, the main justification for green belt release appears to be to provide room for house building and employment land development, which would not seem to meet the standards of 'exceptional circumstances' required for green belt release.

Thank you in advance for considering my comments.

