

## **Warrington Borough Council Local Plan Consultation**

I attended the consultation event recently, and had discussions with members of the consultation team who were very helpful. As result I have a number of comments regarding the proposals which I feel should be considered in developing the final recommendations for adoption.

Given that central government is demanding a growth plan and undefined modelling processes are setting the targets to be met, the proposals do appear to be reasonably well thought out and should lead to a more cohesive developments within the Borough over the next 20 years. While supporting the development of Brownfield sites, I have major concerns over the designs on the Green Belt, which is fundamental to the long term future of Warrington as a desirable place to live and work. Those immediately affected by the proposals, in that their own way of life is permanently blighted, need to be compensated through the provision of attractive arrangements which will compensate them for the loss of current amenity and inevitably loss of value if they are private owners.

While the proposals must, as stated, provide adequate infrastructure investments to support the industry and housing objectives, this must be established before major building starts and not afterwards. As happens in many such programmes, changes in funding arrangements and timescales lead to an out of line approach, with “first phases” of housing etc being built which depend on existing infrastructure, but then the promises of infrastructure catch-up are postponed and plans never fulfilled. This must not be allowed to happen in Warrington, and infrastructure implementation must cover the whole proposal immediately.

There is little in the plan to indicate what will generate growth and whether the increased population predictions are “internal”, ie from natural growth within the current population, or as a result of import of labour to meet the demands of expanding or new industries. Much of the Warrington employment growth seems to hinge on warehousing type operations, which pay minimum wages and are unlikely to create significant wealth within the community as a whole. How are the more skilled employment opportunities to be generated and what incentives will be given to encourage major employment of technically qualified university graduates, who will have the skills to drive business forward.?

Consideration needs to be given to the changing demographics of the area, and the form of housing required to meet the needs and aspirations of new Warringtonians. The vast numbers of one and two bedroom apartments built in the area over the last few years will not meet the needs of growing families, and much of the existing housing stock is out of the price range for aspiring owners on average or minimum wages. Are the housing proposals based on council owned housing, affordable housing, buy to let operations or “executive housing” which seems to be the development of choice for green field sites?

As the populations age, the proposals must include provision of accommodation for the elderly and infirm. There needs to be a proper understanding of the fact that populations operate in 20 or so year cycles, so primary schools in a given newly developing area may be largely redundant after 10 years, while new secondary school

catchment areas will change significantly with time, so their locations need careful selection for long term benefits,. It is possible to end up with a retired population in the area adjacent to industry, in accommodation not planned for this purpose, with the new generation of workers having to travel long distances to their jobs.

Proposals to improve the traffic flows on the M6, M56 and M62 and the resulting better traffic flows to Manchester and Liverpool will make Warrington increasingly more attractive as a commuter base. This will lead to better quality housing being taken over by commuters, and local residents being priced out by those in better paid jobs elsewhere. This will be difficult to avoid and while it may lead to the desired increase in population, it will do little to improve the industrial base of the town.

By the time of the completion of the plan, it would seem highly probable that approaches to transportation will have changed radically. Is the plan proactive or reactive in this respect?. Do people really want to work close enough to their homes, so walking or cycling everywhere is the preferred option, or is everyone going to be crisscrossing the area by (electric) car or public transport? The Warrington western bypass and a resurrected eastern crossing of the ship canal, and the elimination of the need for swing bridges are fundamental to the success of the proposals, so their timescale and chances of implementation need to be incorporated into the thinking.

I would foresee a major increase in traffic coming from the M56 and heading northwards or vice versa, either to avoid the toll bridge in Runcorn or to access work related sites now being proposed. Should consideration be given to a south western bypass from the M56 at Junction 9 to the new western bypass on the A56? This would avoid this traffic passing through Stockton Heath or finding rat runs to bypass this already congested area, and potentially open up further opportunities for expansion, albeit on green field sites.

I look forward to receiving confirmation that the development proposals are proceeding to the next stage, but am disappointed in that the current round of consultation proposals received so little general publicity and were only found by chance access to a website I would not normally use.