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24.9.17

Dear Sir/ Madam

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the PDO, produced as a result of the Review of the Local Area Plan for Warrington.

Like many people, I wish to object, in the strongest possible terms, to the plans to build 24,000 new homes in Warrington in the next 20 years, in particular the plans to put 9,000 of these houses in green belt land. I would also like to object to proposal to build more roads as a solution to the current traffic problems.

**NEW HOMES;**

It is accepted that there is demand for new homes in Warrington, but I believe that the modelling which has been done by WBC to arrive at the current figures is flawed.

**TIMESCALE;** The timescale for the PDO should be reduced to 15 years. There is no requirement to plan over such a long and increasingly uncertain timescale of 20 years, and this has inflated the development figures for development on no sound basis. If the timescale were to be reduced it would allow for future changes, such as the decommissioning of Fiddlers Ferry, to be taken in to account in later plans.

**BREXIT;** The figures for growth for the town should be reviewed; these have not been revisited since the Brexit vote, nor has account been taken of the impact of Brexit on our economy, or of the new proposed Government guidelines on assessment of housing need.

**NUMBERS;** The government are consulting on new guidelines on housing plans. Applied to Warrington these would lead to demand for little more than 15,000 new homes, the figures which our planners are confident can be accommodated on brown field sites in the town. I am aware that the council lost a High Court case with a developer relating to the figures in the 2014 plan. Even if the Council feels the need to revise upwards the figures for new housing in response to this, the 15,000 figure, based on the new guidelines, would represent a 50% increase in the 2014 figures, surely enough in the light of the comment above re current economic forecasts.

**WATER TABLE;** The water table in parts of Grappenhall is already dangerously high, and a full environmental impact assessment need should be undertaken to ensure that any new building does not exacerbate this problem.

**GREEN BELT;** The green belt areas of Warrington were designated as such for important purposes and these purposes remain. I am aware that green belt is under pressure across the region and nationally, and it is time for Warrington Borough Council to reaffirm its commitment to the preservation of the green belt, as it did in the 2014 Area Plan. The 2017 Government White Paper on

Housing states that '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'.

I am aware that the green belt is prime land for developers to choose for development, but this pressure should be resisted, and the Borough Council should show leadership on this issue, as demanded by the clear views of its residents.

#### **TRAFFIC EASING;**

There are huge traffic problems in Warrington, which are likely to be exacerbated when the new toll bridge opens between Runcorn and Widnes, and drivers choose to come through Warrington Town centre to avoid toll charges. The impact of this on air quality and our health, and costs to businesses and individuals, is already huge, and will get worse.

Research has shown that the net effect of more roads is more car journeys, and that any benefits from new roads are quickly lost and congestion recurs. Alternatives to car journeys, such as public transport, park and ride, or cycle ways in Warrington are woefully inadequate.

Further work should be commissioned on traffic easing with a clear emphasis on reducing use of our roads by cars. One suggestion we should consider, alongside improvement in cycleways and public transport, and the introduction of park and ride, is the introduction of congestion charging for the centre of town (with exemptions for Warrington residents, such as has been granted to Halton residents for the new toll bridge). The congestion charge area should cover the town centre, and those parts of town which are used as diversions when there are problems with the M6 at the Thelwall viaduct. The congestion charge should be the same as the toll charge for the new bridge in Halton. The proceeds from the congestion charge should be used to fund improvements in public transport.

#### **CONCLUSION;**

The process of arriving at the PDO, the problems with the consultation process, the cavalier drawing of a road line on a fuzzy plan, which has now blighted the lives of many people, has led to considerable anger and distress in our community. There is an opportunity for some of this ground to be recovered if the Borough Council has the good sense to dispose of the current PDO and develop an integrated plan for our whole town which enhances rather than damages our much loved community.

Your sincerely

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