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**Warrington Borough Council [REDACTED] to the Local Plan – Preferred Development Option Consultation, 29<sup>th</sup> September 2017**

1. [REDACTED] on Warrington Borough Council understands that a Local Plan is needed to give the Borough Council control over development in Warrington. ‘No plan’ is not an option.
2. We are also ambitious for our town. This ambition goes beyond the economic however, and we want to ensure that while looking to the future we are also conscious of preserving its historic character, conserving the environment, enhancing the quality of life and respecting, as far as possible, the wishes and identities of existing communities.
3. We believe that failure to engage with the community adequately over the emerging issues that the Local Plan will have to tackle has been a serious error by the Borough Council. Moreover, it is a missed opportunity. The level of research, thinking and passion shown by residents in response to the Preferred Development Option, during a very short consultation period, during the holiday season, shows the level of interest that the public has in the future of our town. Surely it is not unthinkable that the public could have been engaged earlier and more fully in the process of drawing up the Preferred Development Options, before they were collectively presented, and misinterpreted, by many, as a done deal.
4. The methodology to reach the housing targets used in the plan has been inadequately explained and, as a result, has generated many objections and alternative calculations. It is essential that when the Local Plan is presented that the mechanism for assessing the housing target is far more transparent. Residents need to know:
  - a. The extent to which the target number is driven by local ambition compared to the number required by government
  - b. How Warrington’s number compares to those adopted, or proposed by neighbouring boroughs and how robust it will be in the face of challenges by aspiring developers
  - c. How numbers relate to the land requirement for different forms and sizes of dwellings.
5. We have serious misgivings about the prominence given in the plan to early green belt release. We believe that the town centre and brown field first policy must be prioritised. Warrington’s role as the green lung that separates the Merseyside and Greater Manchester conurbations is essential and must be preserved. Developers must not be encouraged to believe that early easy pickings are available in Warrington’s green belt. The plan as written has not made the case for green-belt release based on population forecasts and government requirements, particularly as additional non-green belt brownfield sites may become available. There should also be a clear assessment in the plan of the environmental and ecological impact of building on currently green land.
6. We also question the need to adopt a twenty-year plan period. A shorter period, such as fifteen years, which we understand is acceptable for a Local Plan, would have the advantage of not being tied into assumptions which are being made at a time of

considerable uncertainties. These include the fallout of Brexit, the future of Fiddler's Ferry, the future of Warrington Hospital and a host of other variables which will be better known within the next five to ten years. We believe that a shorter plan period would allow for a more flexible response and a plan more likely to be fulfilled.

7. We wholly support the principle of 'town centre first' development. The opportunity, the timing and the proportion of development that will take place in the Town Centre and on the Waterfront developments have not been spelled out adequately. Nor has the likely period during which these will come to fruition.
8. We strongly support the principle of 'infrastructure first'. We do however have serious concerns about how this will be financed to ensure prompt delivery. We also have reservations that the amount of additional infrastructure proposed in the Preferred Development Option will meet the ambition of addressing the town's infrastructure needs, not least in terms of reducing congestion and providing adequate hospital facilities. There seems to be a lack of consideration for major investment in public transport, such as a light rail/mass transit system. Only through innovation in public transport will the town reduce the current problems of high car dependency.
9. In terms of infrastructure we are also gravely concerned by the suggestion of using the former railway embankment through Thelwall, Grappenhall and Latchford for a strategic transport route. The approach to this embankment also bisects the Weaste Lane linear settlement, potentially destroying its character. While supportive of the need for a further high-level crossing of the Ship Canal, we ask that more thought goes into the planning of any route with properly informed discussions with the communities affected prior to the inclusion of any route in the Local Plan.
10. Further to our questions regarding housing targets, we also question the densities assumed throughout the plan for housing. These densities will be dependent on the type of housing, and the housing type is closely linked to the affordability of any such housing. There is a clear need, across the whole town, for a mix of smaller homes aimed at younger households looking to establish themselves and older households looking to downsize. Such smaller homes would also address the need for affordable housing.
11. In providing a more appropriate mix of housing styles, we also hope the Borough Council will better address the current disconnect between the location of housing and the location of jobs. A closer alignment of the two will also help to reduce car dependency and therefore traffic congestion.
12. Finally, we would like to state clearly that we consider that the problems raised by the current PDO affect the whole of Warrington and not just those wards we represent. Failures to deal with traffic congestion, hospital provision or affordable housing will not be restricted in terms of impact to a specific part of the town. It is essential that the eventual Local Plan benefits the whole of Warrington: reducing inequalities in access to affordable, appropriate high quality housing; improves the

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Town Centre to benefit all Warrington residents; preserves our green spaces; and creates a sustainable environment for all. While the PDO may aim to do that, it has not been sufficiently clearly communicated and explained. Many Warrington communities have not been convinced that it will achieve those ends.