

Local Plan Review Regulation 18 Consultation Scope and Contents Document

October 2016

WARRINGTON
Borough Council 



 Growing a Strong  Warrington

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1. Introduction

What is this Document?

1.1 This document represents the first stage in reviewing the Council's adopted Local Plan Core Strategy (2014). Stage one of this process, in line with Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012, is the opportunity for the local community and wider stakeholders to comment on the scope and contents of the revised Local Plan.

1.2 The document looks at the Council's evidence base to date and what key issues the evidence base raises that the Council will need to consider as part of the review of the Local Plan. It then sets out the proposed scope of the review and the process the Council will undertake in carrying out the review. The last section provides details on how to respond to this first consultation.

The need to Review the Current Local Plan Core Strategy

1.3 The Warrington Local Plan Core Strategy was adopted by the Council on 21 July 2014 and is the current Statutory Development Plan for the Borough, setting out the overarching strategic policies for guiding the location and level of development in the Borough up to 2027.

1.4 Upon adoption, there was a High Court Challenge which resulted in parts of the Plan being quashed:

- The housing target of 10,500 new homes (equating to 500 per year) between 2006 and 2027 and;
- References to 1,100 new homes at the Omega Strategic Proposal

1.5 Not all of the Local Plan Core Strategy has been overturned and all other policies within the Plan remain unaltered and are considered to be a sound and robust basis for the determination of planning applications across the Borough at this point in time.

1.6 However, given the results of the High Court challenge and the emerging evidence underpinning the Borough's growth needs and economic development ambitions, the Council recognises the need to undertake a review of the Local Plan.

1.7 It is essential that the Council continues to have an up-to-date Development Plan in order to retain control over the type and location of development within the Borough, and so ensuring that development across the Borough is genuinely 'Plan led'.



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2. Evidence Base Issues

2.1 Every Council should ensure that their Local Plan is based on adequate, up-to-date and relevant evidence about the economic, social and environmental characteristics of the area.

2.2 The Council has for some time been developing an evidence base to support the Local Plan and the Council's current evidence base to date can be viewed [here](#).

2.3 This includes evidence undertaken following the High Court ruling which will provide the basis for the review of the Local Plan. This evidence, and the key issues arising from it, are summarised below.

Housing Needs

2.4 The revised Local Plan will set the housing target for the number of new homes that will need to be delivered in the Borough over the Plan period. National Planning Policy requires the Local Plan to fully meet the 'Objectively Assessed Needs' (OAN) for market and affordable housing in the Borough.

2.5 The most up to date study assessing the housing OAN for the Borough is the Mid-Mersey Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2016 (SHMA). The study was undertaken with the neighbouring Local Authorities of Halton and St. Helens and used information consisting of population projections, household formations, the need for affordable housing and the projected jobs growth across the Plan Period to reach the OAN figure.

2.6 **For Warrington, the Mid Mersey SHMA identified an Objectively Assessed Need of 839 new homes (to include 220 Affordable units) per year up to 2037, and an additional 62 bed spaces in Care Homes (specialist housing for elder people), per year up to 2037.**

2.7 The OAN figure is only the starting point and in line with the requirements of national planning policy, the OAN figure should be tested against the Borough's land supply position, infrastructure capacity, environmental constraints, improved affordability and market signals, as well as the Council's economic growth aspirations in order to arrive at a housing target within the Local Plan. This ensures the alignment of all relevant strategies, which might result in a higher or lower housing target within the Local Plan, other than the identified OAN.

Employment Land Needs

2.8 The revised Local Plan will also set out the required amount of employment land to facilitate Warrington's economic growth. For the Local Plan to adequately plan for economic growth it is necessary to understand the amount of new employment land (for offices, factories and warehouses) that is needed. As with housing needs, national planning policy expects the Local Plan to fully meet Objectively Assessed Need (OAN) for economic development in the Borough, taking account of market intelligence, market signals and the locational requirements of particular types of business.



2.9 In order to meet the requirements of national planning policy, the Council commissioned consultants to carry out an Economic Development Needs Assessment (EDNA) to establish the OAN figure for employment land across the Borough. **This study has resulted in an identified OAN figure of 381 hectares of employment land over the next 21 years.**

2.10 This assessment has been based on Warrington's past economic performance, historic take up rates and a detailed analysis of current and future market demand.

Aligning Housing Need with Job Growth

2.11 The Council has also assessed the number of additional jobs that will be created through the Council's growth aspirations set out in the 'Warrington Means Business' economic development programme as well as the Local Enterprise Partnership's (LEP) Strategic Economic Plan and future growth ambitions. **These growth aspirations will deliver 31,000 new jobs in Warrington up to 2040 which is approximately 30% above the baseline forecasts.**

2.12 This number of jobs is considered to be realistic based on comparison with the level of job growth Warrington has achieved over the last 20 years and if the level of employment land identified in the EDNA is brought forward for delivery.

2.13 As the SHMA was based on a baseline forecast of employment growth, it has been necessary to revisit the housing need figure to ensure it is in line with the increase in job numbers envisaged. **To ensure a balance between homes and jobs it will be necessary to increase the minimum supply of homes to around 1,000 per annum.**

2.14 This is the level of housing need the Council intends to take forward through the review of the Local Plan. It will need to be refined ahead of confirmation of the preferred development option to reflect more recent demographic population and household projections which have been released following publication of the SHMA.

Land Supply

2.15 The Council undertook a major review of its Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) which was published in January 2016, identifying committed and planned housing land supply over the next 15 years and beyond. This has subsequently been updated to reflect planning permissions and completions up to 31st March 2016, additional anticipated supply up to 20 years and an updated assessment of windfall allowance. **This identifies a total housing land supply in the urban area and on green field sites outside of the Green Belt of approximately 11,500.**

2.16 Warrington & Co have commissioned more detailed master planning work relating to the town centre and inner Warrington, including the Waterfront Strategic Development Opportunity. **This has identified the potential for approximately 3,500 homes in addition to those identified in the SHLAA over the next 20 years.**



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2.17 **The EDNA has identified a realistic deliverable supply of 107 hectares of employment land within existing and planned employment areas.** In reviewing existing employment areas, it did not identify any potential sites which are no longer suitable for employment use and could be released for housing in addition to those sites already identified within the SHLAA.

2.18 The Council published its updated Open Space Audit in July 2016. This identifies that the majority of the borough has a deficiency of open space and there are no readily available areas of surplus open space in the urban area which lend themselves to development in addition to those sites already identified within the SHLAA.

2.19 Having explored all potential sources of additional land supply, the Council has therefore concluded it is unable to accommodate all of its development needs within the existing urban area and on green field sites outside of the Green Belt. The Council has summarised the work it has undertaken in establishing urban capacity in the Urban Capacity Statement, published as part of this initial consultation.

2.20 **If Warrington is to meet its development needs, then based on the updated assessment of urban capacity, sufficient Green Belt land will need to be released to deliver approximately 5,000 homes and 261¹ hectares of employment land over the next 20 years.**

2.21 The Council will review its assessment of urban capacity ahead of confirmation of the preferred development option to take into account any additional sites within the urban area submitted as part of the 'call of sites' process (see para 4.5).

Green Belt Assessment

2.22 Warrington is heavily constrained by a tight Green Belt boundary around its 'urban areas'. Several inset settlements are excluded from the Green Belt, but also constrained at their outer edges by it, and several settlements are 'washed over' by the Green Belt within the Borough boundary.

2.23 Given evidence is suggesting Warrington cannot meet its development needs within the existing urban area, as part of its evidence base the Council commissioned consultants to carry out an assessment of the Borough's Green Belt against the 5 purposes the Green Belt serves, as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). This assessment will contribute to the consideration of options for meeting development need if it is confirmed that Green Belt land needs to be released.

2.24 In accordance with the NPPF the Council must demonstrate exceptional circumstances to justify the release of Green Belt through a Local Plan review.

Further Evidence Base

2.25 The Council is in the process of updating its Multimodal Transport Model and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment. These pieces of work will feed into the broader assessment of development options under the Sustainability Appraisal process and the development site assessment as set out in Appendix 2.



1 - 274Ha of employment land over 21 years pro-rated to 20 years

3. Proposed Scope of Local Plan Review

Adopted Local Plan Core Strategy (2014)

3.1 The current Local Plan was prepared to facilitate a much lower level of development which could be accommodated without the need for any release of Green Belt. This is reflected in the first two of the six strategic objectives which underpin the Plan. The first objective establishes the level of development to be delivered to 2027 and the second objective reaffirms the current extent of the Green Belt.

3.2 The remaining objectives relate to strengthening the town centre, reducing the need to travel, ensuring high quality design and maintaining and enhancing environmental quality.

3.3 Whilst the first two objectives and the detailed policies which sit under them are no longer consistent with Warrington's identified development needs, the other objectives and associated detailed policies are still considered appropriate to guide future development. They accord with the NPPF, are consistent with the Council's Warrington Means Business programme and were found to be sound following the Examination in Public in 2014.

3.4 In addition, an underlying theme of the Local Plan, running from the strategic vision, strategic objectives and through into detailed objectives and policies, is the need to unlock major development opportunities in the town centre and inner Warrington and in doing so address existing congestion in the town. This remains a key Council priority and will need to remain integral to the revised Local Plan.

3.5 The Council therefore considers that it is appropriate and more expedient to review the existing Local Plan, rather than preparing an entirely new Plan.

Focus for the review

3.6 Given that evidence is suggesting much more development across the Borough than the current Local Plan anticipated, the review of the Plan will be focused on three strategic matters, which will have a significant impact on the future planning strategy for the area: These are:

- **The provision of land and level of housing development that can be accommodated within Warrington, taking into account Objectively Assessed Needs (OAN);**
- **The provision of land for economic development and a growing local economy, taking into account Objectively Assessed Needs (OAN); and**
- **Ensuring the timely delivery of new and improved physical and social infrastructure required to meet the needs of new development and mitigate the impacts on existing communities.**



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3.7 Following confirmation of the preferred development option, the Council will assess all of the existing visions, objectives and policies in the Plan to establish if they require major or minor alteration. The Council's initial view on the parts of the Plan that will need to be subject to either a major or minor alteration is set out in Appendix 1.

Local Plan Period

3.8 National Planning Policy requires Local Plans to be drawn up over an appropriate time scale, preferably a 15-year time horizon, take account of longer term requirements, and kept up to date.

3.9 In considering amending Green Belt boundaries the NPPF is clear that the Council needs to have regard to their intended permanence in the long term, so that they should be capable of enduring beyond the plan period. **For this reason, the Council is proposing a Plan period of 20 years.**

3.10 A 20 year Plan period would also enable the Council to consider more comprehensive forms of development which may provide a more sustainable development solution than smaller areas of incremental development.

Safeguarded Green Belt Land Needs-Post Local Plan Review

3.11 A Key feature of Green Belts are their permanence and they should, once established, be capable of enduring beyond the current Plan period. For a Local Planning Authority, this means there is potentially a need to remove further land from the Green Belt and Safeguard it for future longer term development, beyond the current Plan period. **Safeguarded Land will therefore also need to be part of the Plan Review.**

Minerals and Waste Needs

3.12 The current Plan does not contain all the necessary policies relating to Minerals and Waste. **The opportunity for including Minerals and Waste as part of the review of the Local Plan will be considered following the scoping consultation, taking into account representations received.**

Gypsy and Traveller Needs

3.13 The current Plan does not allocate sites to accommodate the needs for permanent gypsy and traveller sites. **The opportunity for including the allocation of permanent gypsy and traveller sites as part of the review of the Local Plan will be considered following the scoping consultation, taking into account representations received.**

