



I write to Warrington Borough Council today to strongly object to the Preferred Development Option issued recently by the Council and currently up for consultation. I particularly object to its proposals for South Warrington and in particular to the creation of a City Garden Suburb and the road that would use the Trans Pennine Trail in the area of Thelwall and Grappenhall.

It is very clear from the strength of feeling and disappointment of the residents of Warrington that I have personally had contact with recently, including my own family, my neighbours, the residents who use our local post office, shops and amenities and all the people I spoke to and heard expressing their views at the public consultation at the Park Royal hotel that no one supports this overly ambitious plan.

The main reasons that I would never support the plan in its current format are as follows:

Bid for City status for Warrington

This plan appears to be strongly connected with the ambitions of a few senior staff at WBC and some elected Councillors to bid to achieve City status for Warrington. In my experience there is no desire amongst the Warrington residents I know and have spoken to recently to have Warrington made into a city. Certainly at the Park Royal consultation many people were unaware of this potential bid and no one amongst the attendees I heard or spoke to wanted city status for Warrington. We have the magnificent cities of Liverpool and Manchester on our doorsteps and should we need the amenities that a city provides, they are within half an hour by car or train. My family and I live in Warrington because that's the style of living we prefer and the community we wish to bring up our children and grandchildren in. The Council has no right to proceed with a bid for City status that is not wholly supported by all Warrington residents. All WBC employees and elected members have a duty to represent its residents at all times. I do not recall any efforts made by either Council staff or our local Councillors to ask for support to proceed with such a bid.

Inadequate Consultation process

The consultation process used by WBC over the summer was woefully inadequate and no effort was made by either the Council or our local Councillors to highlight to residents that this plan had been developed and was being put forward as a 'Preferred Option' – preferred by the WBC staff who developed it maybe but certainly not preferred by its residents. The Council has a duty to communicate all matters that will impact on the quality of the lives of its residents. Just placing information on a website is a totally inadequate way to let residents know about major developments that will impact on their way of life in this community. No effort was made to put up posters in public places, to leaflet residents or to use social media to inform the public. WBC should have used the already well established local community groups and forums to advertise this plan and the consultation process. Many people including myself have expressed their great disappointment at the failure of our elected councillors to ensure that the residents in their areas were made aware of the plan and its content. I have no doubt that the disappointment in our local councillors will be expressed at the next local elections. I for one will not be voting for the same candidate who represents my area as they have done nothing to inform myself or my neighbours of this consultation process.

Impact of the development of a Garden City Suburb

The proposal to develop a garden city suburb in South Warrington is totally unrepresentative of the needs of Warrington as a borough or of its residents. Such a massive development is not necessary for the town and will have a massive negative impact on the area. It is clearly connected with the personal ambitions of a very few individuals at WBC who have no regard for the needs and wishes of Warrington's residents who they are paid and elected to represent. Warrington does not need the amount of housing proposed in the plan in many areas of the town but predominantly in the area indicated for development as a garden city suburb. Its calculations are flawed and based on out of date data. Warrington certainly does not need 10,000 homes to be built in south Warrington. The homes Warrington may need should be 'affordable' and I know that properties in south Warrington would not be what the majority of families would regard as affordable. My 2 adult children and their partners want to live in south Warrington but cannot afford to buy a property in the area despite each couple having a combined income of £70k.

These homes should they ever be built would be taken up by people from out of Warrington thus increasing the population enormously. Add to this they would be using vehicles to travel around and in and out of Warrington on our already inadequate A roads and motorways, this would bring increased traffic chaos and raise the already unacceptable levels of pollution in this town.

It is totally unacceptable that the plan identifies such huge amounts of land that WBC proposes to take out of the currently protected Green Belt. Warrington does not have the exceptional reasons it would need to take swathes of land out of the protected Green Belt in this area. Warrington had many brown field sites that could be used for housing purposes and WBC should be focusing on developing these areas and making sure the homes built there are truly affordable to young and growing families.

This plan appears to have little or no regard for the impact on the countryside, the importance of preserving the protected green belt and the negative effects on wildlife.

The plan certainly has no consideration for the reduction in the quality of life for the current residents of south Warrington.

Health and Well Being of Warrington residents

One of the most important responsibilities of Warrington Borough Council staff and elected members should be to prioritise the health and well being of its residents. The over ambitious nature of this plan and its poorly thought out proposals could in no way contribute to the health and well being of the residents who will be directly and indirectly affected by many of its proposals.

Little or no regard has been given to impact of increasing the population of Warrington on the already overstretched NHS. I have personal experience of the negative impact of the strains and stresses the NHS in this town is already under. In the last 12 months myself, my daughter and my brother have all needed treatment for serious conditions from the NHS. We have witnessed at first hand how care is not of the standard it should be because of under staffing and lack of funding. And we each know the distress that can be caused because an essential service is hugely under resourced and under constant pressure.

Warrington's NHS services are not in a position to serve and care for an increasing population. With further cuts proposed by our national government the situation is unlikely to improve. It is irresponsible of WBC to put forward plans that will increase the local population and put an ever increasing burden on the NHS.

It is also irresponsible to propose developments within the Borough that will increase traffic problems – already a massive issue in this town and already causing local motorists a great deal of stress and concern – and of course the associated increases in air pollution.

Proposals for a high level crossing using the Trans Pennine Trail

This particular proposal is unrealistic and such a road is not needed in the area. It is difficult to believe that a proposal to use the local stretch of the Trans Pennine Trail as the route for a high level Canal crossing and strategic route through Warrington has been included in this plan. This ludicrous proposal has upset and distressed a great many residents in the Thelwall and Grappenhall parishes.

I walk along this trail regularly and have done so for 23 years. It is obvious that this route is not suitable to be developed into a road of any nature – not as a normal highway, a bus route or the dual carriageway that was suggested by some at the consultation event could be built. Firstly the current bridge across the Canal has been closed for many years as it is unsafe even for pedestrians to cross let alone vehicles. So obviously, should this ridiculous proposal be taken further, it would be necessary to take down the current structure and build a much wider and stronger bridge – since this would be necessary does it not make more sense and wouldn't it be more cost effective to build a bridge crossing further up the canal away from residential areas? In addition any widening of the Trans Pennine Trail which would be necessary for any traffic to be able to use the proposed road would necessitate the compulsory purchase of many houses and apartment blocks which currently back on to the Trail. Quite apart from the distress that would cause to the residents involved, it would cost the Council tens of millions of pounds to make the compulsory purchases. And then there would be the massive cost of the bridge and road construction. This proposal could not possibly be justified in terms of its cost to the Council or the massive negative impact on the residential areas of Thelwall and Grappenhall, and the major blight on the landscape that such a massive construction project would create. WBC really do need to think more realistically about this part of the Development plan.

Further observations

I do clearly understand the need to make long term plans for the Borough and to continually improve the living conditions of its residents. I also understand that it is the duty of Borough Council staff and the elected members of the Council to serve the interests of their community. I and many other residents do not agree that this PDO in its current format serves the best interests of Warrington residents.

The way in which this plan has been developed with the idea of Warrington becoming a City at its centre is seriously flawed and unacceptable to thousands of Warrington residents. Because of the timing of the consultation, the poor communication of the existence of this plan, the very short original consultation period and the lack of support from our local elected members, WBC have given the impression that they are trying to get this contentious plan through as quietly as possible so as not to have too many objections to its being put into operation. Sadly this has damaged the view many residents now have of the Council.

However, Warrington must move forward and I for one will be happy to work with our local MP Faisal Rashid who spoke very sensibly at the Park Royal consultation, and other concerned residents to suggest a more realistic plan which would benefit the Borough of Warrington not blight it.

I believe that WBC should be focused on the following areas to improve the lives and health and well being of its residents:

- Improving the road infrastructure through and around the town – work that in some places appears to have been started but there is still much room for improvement. This does not necessarily mean massive building projects but could be something as simple as widening certain junctions and adding more lanes at traffic lights, improving road surfaces, using more double yellow lines to prevent parking impeding the flow of traffic on certain main roads, building pedestrian bridges at particularly busy junctions and improving the timing at key traffic lights throughout the town
- Improving our local public transport network e.g. making the local bus services more reliable, punctual and affordable and creating more free/cheaper parking at our 2 railway stations so that people will be more inclined to use the trains
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I hope the Council will heed the objections of its residents to the current PDO and will make a concerted effort to work more closely with the residents it is obliged to serve to create a town and community we would all be proud to live in.

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