



## Objecting to the Preferred Development Option

**A group of local residents has been working together to try and find some information that might be useful when you are responding to the Council's Consultation on their Preferred Development Option (PDO).**

**You don't have to use all of these points, or any of them at all if you don't want to, but we hope they help you decide what you want to say, or the questions you want to ask.**

The principal reasons for objecting to the PDO are:

1. The flawed vision for making Warrington a city
2. The inadequacy of the Consultation process
3. The miscalculation of the Housing needs
4. The lack of exceptional circumstances for reclassifying the Green Belt

Or...the wrong plan for the wrong number of the wrong type of homes in the wrong places!!!

Apart from the poor communication and engagement with residents, the Council officers have failed to carry out the necessary ecological, transport and air quality surveys that would have informed a robust and sustainable plan.

In making your response, you may wish to highlight some of the challenges below.

## The Inadequacy of Consultation Process

- The consultation process has been not only inadequate and badly communicated, but driven by an unjustified end point – the residents of Warrington do not want to live in a city, but they do want a vibrant and usable town centre and a fit for purpose transport infrastructure.
- WBC should have learned from earlier consultation stages and, rather than invite the easy building over the Green Belt, evolved a constrained development option driven solely by the innovative regeneration of brownfield sites to meet anticipated demographically required housing needs.
- The Green Belt satisfied the tests of durability when it was designated and WBC have presented no exceptional circumstances to justify a change.
- There is no evidence beyond an incorrect and inadequate financial model to support deliverability of even just the demographically required future housing needs.

- With its investment in Redwood Bank there is a suspicion that WBC are going to subsidise developers and are not independent to the process.
- The residents of the borough deserve a higher standard of disclosure and transparency than has been shown to date if WBC is to regain the support of the electorate.

### The new homes and employment land needed in Warrington

The PDO document is very technical and references certain key numbers as given “fact” without direct links to the source material or considering alternative calculations.

The Objectively Assessed Needs (OAN) is cited on p.5 of the PDO as 839 new homes per annum - but this was based on 2012 surveys. Before publishing the PDO, WBC were in possession of an updated May 2017 report based on 2014 data which shows a comparable figure of just 738 homes per year (but could be as low as 679 homes pa), but this number has been ignored.

As the 839 is taken as the base for the higher Economic Development Needs Assessment (EDNA), then if the 839 is a significant overstatement, so must be the EDNA.

The lower number is more consistent with the 716 homes pa average until 2039 within the latest ONS live tables which could be used to underpin the Government’s proposed formula for calculating OAN published in September 2017.

- The PDO should have been prepared on the basis of the May 2017 addendum (or at very least stated at outset that it was based on out-of-date estimates that had subsequently been shown to be significant overstatements).
- There is no recognition of alternative assumptions and so the broad range of potential outcomes, particularly those with much lower housing requirements.
- The legal challenge to the previously adopted Local Development Plan was premised on the plan not properly reflecting the OAN and affordable housing requirement.
- However the PDO is stated to be “Option 2” – this is based on the aspiration of the Council executive to create a “new city”, it is not the independent, objective and expertly assessed *need* of the town.
- The data used by the officers to derive the housing need is highly sensitive to the interrelationship between employment, population demographics and dwelling occupancy. The particular assumptions used appear to have been selected to justify a higher housing requirement significantly above the OAN and do not appear logical, consistent or robust.
- Option 2 is based on an excess employment and economic growth outlook that is based on very high level assumptions and considerations completely outside the control or influence of WBC, and ignore the competing aspirations of adjacent and further afield boroughs and housing areas.

- All the economic initiatives highlighted under the EDNA such as Cheshire devolution and HS2/HS3 will, if they ever come to fruition, be needed just to provide jobs for the natural increase in the population, they are not a justification for even more housing.
- The projections used are based on data periods prior to the Brexit referendum. The Plan should be based on an updated Strategic Housing Market Assessment that takes account of latest economic, demographic and migratory expectations.
- In addition, the housing requirement should be based on a calculation of OAN that is consistent with the methodology and data underpinning the Government's September 2017 proposals for a nationally consistent approach.
- Any higher levels of development should be clearly and separately identified as excess to Needs and so subject to a much higher standard of justification and challenge.
- There appears no specific consideration of how technology will impact lifestyles and working practices, an issue not unique to Warrington. Unless and until there is a proper understanding of future employment nature and density, it is almost impossible to define what employment land is required, let alone where it should be.
- There is no Government requirement to produce a twenty-year plan even if long-term ONS statistics exist.
- WBC should produce a ten year plan, by which point we will be much clearer of the economic and migratory impacts of Brexit, the impact from any completed national infrastructure initiatives and what the consequences of technological change have been on work and home life (and balance). It would also allow for the decommissioning of Fiddlers Ferry and so the availability of an enormous brownfield site requiring regeneration.

**What else matters to you? Write to the Borough council telling them what you think of the plan.**

You can do that by email or post.

Email: [ldf@warrington.gov.uk](mailto:ldf@warrington.gov.uk).

Write to: Warrington Borough Council, Planning Policy and Programmes,  
New Town House, Buttermarket Street, Warrington, Cheshire, WA1 2NH

It doesn't matter how long or short your response is. The important thing is to let the council know the strength of feeling.

**TIME IS RUNNING OUT – THE NEW DEADLINE FOR COMMENTS IS  
5 pm 29<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER**

## Notes regarding Warrington Borough Council's flawed consultation process

A Supreme Court case against Haringey Borough Council in 2014 set the benchmark for the standards of local authority consultation. The case made it clear that while there is no general legal duty to consult people affected by a decision, a duty to consult may arise out of the Council's **common law duty of fairness** (R(BAPIO Action Limited) v Secretary of State for the Home department [2007] EWCA Civ 1139).

The key message from the Haringey case is that consultations must be carried out fairly. Looking at issues of who, when, how and evidence based analysis.

1. Who should they consult- the demands of fairness are higher where the authority contemplates depriving someone of something;
2. How should they consult – if someone is likely to be worse off they should be specifically identified and consulted;
3. When to consult- it should be done with sufficient time to allow people to know what you are thinking of doing, telling them the options and giving time for them to reflect on it:
  - a. Consultation should be at a time when the proposals are still at a formative stage to allow for "intelligent consideration and response";
  - b. Adequate time must be given;
  - c. It must allow the public meaningful participation in the process;
4. Analysis- The data collected from the consultation must be handled and objectively managed – there must be sound data collection, processing and analysis.

Warrington Borough Council has failed in several respects.

The highest court in the land requires that if a person is to be worse off as a result of the proposals they should be contacted directly by hand delivered letters and by telephone if necessary. This should have been reinforced by street notices and press releases. None of which have been done by the council. The courts have determined that use of the Council's website alone is not sufficient. People affected should have been identified and targeted with communications. Most of Grappenhall will consider themselves to be worse off as a result of these proposals but a number will definitely lose businesses and property. Communication has therefore been ineffective and compromised the consultation process.

There appears to be no evidence of a scoping exercise around the consultation and no steering group. The greater the involvement with the community the better. No links have been forged with local groups, community representatives, bodies and forums to ensure understanding of the proposals and also the process.

It is not clear how the council has determined the necessary period of consultation. It has given the minimum time possible for people to be consulted. Consultations of this size and nature could last for 3 months. It has consulted over the holiday period meaning a large proportion of those affected will not have been made aware of the consultation being carried out or have been unable to access the information.

There is no evidence of a communications strategy. The communication has been very inadequate. The information is poor and the plans are illegible. Information from the planning officers at the public meetings has been conflicting and unclear. In addition, the data and documents provided in the consultation are not digestible during the period allowed for the consultation.

There has been no proper access given to the consultation documentation. The information has been placed online and at libraries only as far as we are aware. Only a limited amount of paper forms have been made available and then only on request and by collection from the council offices. The Council have relied too heavily on online forms and information. The council should not assume that people have access to technology.

There has been no proper data collection at the consultation meetings. A note of the number and name and address of attendees was not taken. Feedback forms were not provided to the attendees to allow the council or any other relevant body to determine the usefulness and appropriateness of these meetings. Attendees at the meetings did not see the council's planners taken any notes of comments made to them.

The consultation timetable does not even seem to include the requirement for a report to be produced summarising the results of the consultation that is currently being carried out.

The council have failed to provide a proper consultation plan including a communications plan. This should have been drafted, tested and then implemented. People have not been enabled to take part in this extensive plan consultation. The council must give active consideration of the data collected.

Even in times of local government austerity this is not just best practice it is a requirement.