



Dear Sir / Madam

I would like to set out some feedback & concerns in respect of the WBC development plan. Overall I am very worried about the impact the development plan will have on the future appeal of Warrington as a place to live and work, and therefore its success as a town. By way of context, I am an Appleton resident and business owner.

The Economy, Housing Demand & Population Growth

It has recently been reported in the press that net migration since the Brexit vote a year ago has reduced considerably, to a very low level. Immigration has fallen substantially while emigration has increased by 59% in this period. It is highly likely that emigration will continue to rise as Brexit moves ahead as the UK will be a less attractive place for foreign workers, in part due to a weak pound but also likely increased regulations as part of any deal with the EU.

This leads to a notable slow-down in population growth, which in turn reduces demand for housing. Emigration (up by 59%) frees up existing housing stock.

The economy is likely to slow following Brexit, and the consensus of economists is that GDP growth will be reduced considerably. There is also uncertainty as to the future economic and trading environment in the UK, which is leading to a lack of investment by UK businesses. At the same time the weak pound has driven inflation up to 2.9%, and consumers' pockets are being squeezed. Despite the pressure on consumers, the Bank of England has indicated that interest rate raises may be required soon to address the increase in inflation.

The economic factors above will lead to reduced spending power for consumers, reduced affordability of mortgages, and a reduction in demand for housing.

Following the last financial crisis in 2007 – 2008, parts of Ireland were left with empty housing estates, as the economy collapsed and there was no demand for the housing stock built.

I believe the Council's estimate of the number of new homes that are required is grossly overstated. I am very concerned that a reduction in population growth and slow-down in the economy will combine to leave new housing estates as white elephants, in turn impacting on the appeal of Warrington as a place to live.

Use of Brown Field vs. Green field

I recognise that new homes needs to be provided and that the Government is applying pressure to local councils to do so, but per the above I question the Council's desire to build so many new units. To the extent that new homes are required, it is essential for the environment that Brown field sites be redeveloped before Green field sites are built on. The country is not getting any bigger; if each year we build on a field, what does the country look like in 50 years?

In the Warrington region there are large Brown field sites that will become available for development, including Fiddler's Ferry and the current Warrington Hospital site. The Council should also consider more use of apartments to increase housing density and therefore reduce the impact on Green field sites.

Green Belt Land

Green Belt land was designated as such in order to protect it from future development, in order to preserve the environment in a region for future generations. The National Planning Policy Framework states that Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, and I would strongly argue that the current need for additional homes to be built does not constitute "exceptional circumstances".

The UK will soon be a more independent nation following the Brexit vote. We should therefore preserve as much agricultural land as possible as we will need to be more self-sufficient as a nation, growing and farming more of our own food.

Traffic Congestion

North, south and central Warrington are already congested areas. The limited number of river / canal crossings, and the close proximity to heavily used motorways (the M6 over Thelwall in particular), mean that severe congestion is encountered on a regular basis. This must already impact on the appeal of central Warrington as a place to shop or work, and increased housing stock without suitable supporting infrastructure will only make matters worse.

The suggested Eastern Link from M56 J10 to north of the Ship Canal risks becoming the “Thelwall Viaduct Bypass”. As soon as there is an issue on the viaduct (weekly), the new link road will be used to avoid the problem. The M56 around this area (from J11 leading to M6 junction) is also frequently heavily congested, further traffic which will use new roads as a “rat run” to avoid blocked routes.

The combination of increased housing stock, and heavy passing traffic using new roads as an alternative to congested motorways, will lead to significantly increased congestion in and around Warrington. This in turn will impact on the success of town centre shops and businesses.

City Status

What is behind the desire for Warrington to become a City? Given the town’s close proximity to Liverpool and Manchester, I do not believe that Warrington will capture suitable investment from businesses or retailers to make this ambition successful. Large professional firms, banks, other financial institutions and many significant businesses already have established presences in Liverpool and Manchester, and there is no need for such organisations to support a new City so close. I can see no good reason to pursue City status other than vanity, and it will come at a high price.

Stockton Heath

Stockton Heath is a successful village. It attracts many people from outside the region to its shops, bars and restaurants and is a real success story for the Warrington region. I do not believe there is a similar centre to the north of town?

The proposed scale of development in the south of Warrington will leave the area much more built up, more congested, and less attractive as a place to visit.

Stockton Heath will suffer from reduced visitor numbers which will adversely affect the many businesses there.

Healthcare

Local medical centres and the main Warrington and Halton Hospitals are either at or close to full capacity, and the introduction of so many new residents will place untenable pressure on medical services in the region. Substantial investment in new health centres and a new hospital will be required if new homes are to be created on any scale.

In conclusion

The Council's preferred option will leave Warrington as a substantially less attractive place to live and work. Housing estimates are overstated and there is a risk of creating over-supply in the housing market. The region is already very crowded and local services under pressure; building thousands of new homes with associated car ownership will make the area much more congested. The environment of south Warrington will be severely adversely impacted, making the region less attractive. Wildlife that currently inhabits the region will be displaced or eliminated. The preferred plan irrevocably destroys Green Belt land and Green field sites before Brown field sites are used and without due consideration for the above concerns.

Overall I request that the Council:

- revisits their housing targets
- makes use of Brown field sites with high housing density (apartments)
- ensures that where development does take place, the supporting infrastructure is commensurate with the impact on the local population
- undertakes extensive wildlife surveys before committing to a plan
- minimises the use of Green field sites
- does not reverse existing Green Belt status
- challenges the desire for City status
- scales back the final development plans to avoid "white elephant" housing

estates in the area.

Yours faithfully

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Appleton Resident