

Objections to Warrington Borough Council, proposed Local Plan, 2019

Introduction

The Warrington Local Plan in effect transforms the green areas of Warrington into one huge urban sprawl. Despite very small pockets of 'green' on the plans such an action will alter Warrington forever and deny those from within and outside the borough a pleasant, health giving space to recharge after the stress of everyday life. Land farmed for hundreds of years will disappear forever closely followed by a severe diminution of wildlife and for some species total local annihilation. Noise, litter and air pollution produced as the result of the excessive house building in the green belt and proposed logistics hubs are of great concern especially as Warrington does not have a good record on air pollution already. It gives scant thought to the latest national reports on planning³ for the next few decades, expunges a national initiative^{Item 4}, and fails to capitalise on some of its strongest assets, namely green belt and agricultural land and for these reasons we consider the plan unsound.

The following points illustrate our objections:

1. Pollution and congestion.

- Current infra structure is incapable of managing the proposed development. Excessive house building and proposed logistics hubs would encourage more vehicles on the residential roads of south Warrington e.g. Grappenhall, Thelwall and Stockton Heath. The rush hour, the school run, the periodic closure of both the M6 and M56, as a result of accidents and traffic volume, together with the closure of the three swing bridges across the Manchester Ship Canal, results in near gridlock in the whole area and will only get worse. Already the local roads have become 'rat runs' with vehicle emissions being the main source of pollution. Litter problems and hazardous failure to adhere to speed limits exacerbate the situation. These only serve to show the unsound nature of the proposed plan.

2 Impact upon the Greenbelt.

- **Ecology.** The proposed development greatly impinges on and compromises the green belt. The environmental and ecological impact of these proposals will have a devastating effect on biodiversity as a consequence of the loss of agricultural land and wildlife habitats. Substitution of mature trees, hedgerows and farmland with new and maintained plantings is not a viable option and would severely devastate wildlife habitats. As an example, the following is a

short list of the role of some of our existing mature tree and hedge species
e.g.

- Birch (*Betula*) supports about 229 species of insects
Hawthorn (*Crataegus*) supports about 149 species of insects
Oak (*Quercus*) supports about 284 species of insects ¹

- The *Institute of Public Policy Research* has already stated. "The UK...is described as one of the most nature depleted countries in the world". Thus, we should be protecting rather than creating maintained and unnatural areas once the original wildlife has been tragically expunged.

- Simon Clulow of the University of Newcastle in a recent report commented on the effects of so-called relocation of wildlife as part of development strategies: *"While animals are spared a socially unacceptable death of being crushed under a bulldozer, they then perish out of sight... We are approving developments upon mitigation strategies that are flawed. If this isn't managed well, it contributes to species decline and ultimately risks extinctions"*²

One of the purposes of the green belt is to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment and abandonment of this principle is an unsound proposal on the part of Warrington Borough Council.

- The environmental and ecological impact of the loss of green belt will be massive. Such development swallows up farmland and wildlife habitats and as a consequence increases air pollution, flood risk and car dependency. Historic trees, hedgerows, pond areas and green spaces have been undervalued. In contrast other local councils are planning to reduce their green belt allocations as part of their development plans; Halton appear to have reduced the amount of green belt they plan to use. Warrington Borough Council should do the same and on the same scale.
- Currently the WBC plan reduces the green belt by 10% – 11% mostly in south Warrington. The Garden Suburb would have approx. 4,500 homes on this land. Why is this proposed development not spread more evenly throughout the whole borough? No exceptional circumstances are demonstrated to justify the loss of this massive area to housing. All brown field sites should be exhausted before green belt is considered. Where is the evidence that this has been done? CPRE state that 84% of homes built on green belt in recent years have been for the middle or top end of the market resulting in millions of people losing valuable access to countryside without doing anything to tackle the housing shortage.
- **Employment.** A significant part of green belt would be lost to proposed logistics sites (Stobart's and Six:56). Typical of this type of warehouse development would be low paid employment with much of the workforce needing to be sourced from outside the area e.g. St Helens and Widnes. This would further contribute to the already existing traffic emission pollution and

vehicle congestion. Other vacant industrial sites in Warrington should be considered.

- The **Garden Suburb** will change the local and distinct character of the rural Cheshire villages. The Local Plan does not clearly show special circumstances for using the green belt and the whole character of the local area will be destroyed together with its local history and heritage

3 Agricultural and farming land use.

- The local agricultural and green spaces provide an area for carbon dioxide absorption into the soil. If the area is built upon the profile of CO₂ emissions will rise considerably and add to the amount of pollution for which Warrington is responsible.
- A report, *The Best Use of UK Agricultural Land*,¹ has been produced by the University of Cambridge hosting a Natural Capital Leaders Platform in collaboration with *Asda, Sainsbury's, Nestlé, BOCM PAULS, AB Agri, Yara, BASF, and Volac*, as well as the *National Farmers' Union (NFU)* and the Country Land and Business Association. The aim was to understand the amount of additional land needed and provide a simple clear vision for UK agricultural land use alongside a set of principles to guide future decision making.
- *The Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (CISL)* has warned that "By 2030, the UK could require up to 7 million hectares of additional land to meet a growing population's food, space and renewable energy needs, while increasing the area needed to protect nature and its services". This represents more than 35% of the UK's existing agricultural land and compares with up to 5 million hectares that might be released from a range of potential supply side initiatives.⁴

For the above reasons we consider the WBC Local Plan is unsound.

4 Urban sprawl

- The amount of greenbelt land which would be required for the current proposals is deplorable. Within a few years the linear development, which greenbelt was designed to prevent, will have engulfed the whole of the outskirts of Warrington.
- Only five years ago Warrington Borough Council's green belt boundary was confirmed within a twenty year plan. This advanced planning is problematic. Instead planning for the next ten to fifteen years should require less or no green belt release. As it stands the proposed Local Plan is unsound and takes no notice of the Council's existing plans.

5. Countryside health benefits.

- There should be a greater focus on the benefits which the countryside brings to mental and physical health. Only last year *Natural England* highlighted the benefits of 'green care' and quoted that in any one year at least 1 in 4 people will experience a 'significant' mental health problem³. The Warrington Local Plan highlights yet again the national crisis facing the countryside and the strongest possible case should be made for countryside protection and enhancement, as promulgated by the *Campaign to Protect Rural England*.

Conclusion

The Local Plan as a whole contradicts all the criteria for a green belt. A clear and well defined local plan covering infra structure, a clearly defined transport infra structure, realistic population employment and housing needs should be addressed. With so many poorly defined and generalised sections the WBC Local Plan is unrealistic, unsound and should be reviewed.



Ruth D Brown

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Sources

1. http://www.britishecologicalsociety.org/100papers/100_Ecological_Papers/100_Influential_Papers_055.pdf
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3. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/connecting-with-nature-offers-a-new-approach-to-mental-health-care>
4. <http://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/two-million-hectare-shortfall-in-uk-land-possible-by-2030-study-finds>