

Paul Hennessey



16th April 2019

Dear Sirs,

Following the recent publication of the Warrington Local Plan 2017-2037, by Warrington Borough Council regarding the Planned Development for future expansion of the town by proposing to build up to 20,000 houses, I wish to formally object to this plan in the strongest possible way.

Whilst I am greatly concerned regarding any proposals to build on the green belt before brown field and urban regeneration options are fully exhausted, as a local resident of Higher Walton, I wish to raise objections and serious concerns over the proposal to release protected status, green belt land in the area of Higher Walton [REDACTED] and believe the consultation regarding this designated area of land and the development plan by Peel Holdings to be fundamentally flawed.

As a local resident living close to the sites of proposed development, I and many others in the area believe that the plans threaten to destroy the unique rural character and agricultural importance of the area. Myself and other members of the community are firmly of the view that the proposed developments on greenbelt protected land will have a serious negative impact on the local community and that protected green belt areas should remain protected.

The report states "*The ability to make such a significant and sustainable contribution towards meeting Warrington's development needs provides the exceptional circumstances required to justify the removal of the South West Urban Extension from the Green Belt*". This seems a very weak argument, lacking in technical detail and does not take into account or make reference to the brown field and urban regeneration options the town can provide. If this parcel of land was the last remaining option for Warrington Borough Council then the argument may hold some weight, however it obviously is not the case. It may be easier to build upon and attract less clean up / decontamination issues, however difficulty of brown field site regeneration (that many other local authorities easily overcome) is not an 'exceptional circumstance'. In fact, the NPPF states that brown field sites are to be prioritised over the development of green field and greenbelt. Why are Warrington Borough Council ignoring these regulations?

The specific objections are as follows:-

Presence of a viable alternative – Fiddlers Ferry Power Station

Green belt and green field land is protected by law and is the name given to describe the UK government policy for controlling urban growth. This legislation exists precisely to prevent the type of development proposed by Warrington Borough Council in order to maintain the land for agriculture or outdoor leisure purposes and protect the rural countryside.

The consultation documentation provided by Warrington Borough Council makes mention of the

Fiddlers Ferry Power Station only for industrial use. The original consultation document detailed the site as a possible alternative to the development plans, however it is unclear why this has not been taken forward in the analysis in further detail. As an ex industrial site, it would require decontamination, however as previously stated, difficulty of brown field site regeneration (that many other local authorities easily overcome) is not an 'exceptional circumstance' to ignore this exceptionally large parcel of land that will require development in the very near future.

This is simply unacceptable for a development plan spanning 20 years in to the future, given the readily available information regarding the status of the Fiddlers Ferry Power Station. The power station site is clearly appropriate for consideration for the following reasons: -

1. As a coal fuelled power station, the continued use of Fiddlers Ferry goes against current government policy to phase out the use of coal as a fuel in order to meet CO² emission and climate change targets. The current government have stated that all coal powered power stations will be taken out of service by 2025 (well with the scope of Warrington Borough Councils 20 year plan). Note: On average Fiddlers Ferry Power Station consumes 16,000 tons of coal per day. With the emergence of Gas and renewable developments in the area, it is highly unlikely Fiddlers Ferry Power Station will remain active beyond 2025.
2. The 45 year old plant has been 'loss making' for 2 years and is now beyond its expected design life. Planned closure in 2017 was narrowly avoided due to an extended contract to provide power until September 2019. No further contracts beyond this date have been agreed and the power station is likely to enter its decommissioning phase.
3. The NPPF states that brown field sites are to be prioritised over the development of green field and greenbelt, however in light of the above information, when taking the same 20 year plan view of the Council, these plans offer up greenbelt in advance. Therefore Warrington Borough Council should be investigate to full extent of their capabilities the use of Fiddlers Ferry Power Station.

This substantially large plot of industrial land, located close to Higher Walton would accommodate the 1,800 houses planned for the Higher Walton Development and would likely accommodate 1,000's of other houses planned for other areas of Warrington's protected Green Belt areas.



Figure 1: Successful conversion of Battersea Power Station, London provided 4,239 homes onto the 39 acre site, alongside shopping outlets and other attractions / amenities.

I strongly believe before any further planning development activities regarding the protected green belt land is undertaken, the adjacent Fiddlers Ferry Power Station option must be fully investigated and presented for consultation to the residents of Warrington.

Failure to do so would be in direct opposition of the NPPF requirement to prioritise 'brownfield' over 'green belt and green field'.

NON-EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCE: NPPF states that greenbelt is to be protected and requires exceptional circumstances to be built on. If Fiddlers Ferry Power Station and other brownfield sites exist in the locality, then there is 'nothing exceptional' about the council's plan.

Additionally, I would question where the figure and requirement for 20,000 homes has come from. The 20,000 figure seems to be heavily weighted in Warrington Borough Councils aim to be granted City status and has been calculated on above average population increases. Does it take into account dropping immigration projections due to Brexit? Is this the actual government target or is it Warrington Borough Councils own target? If so, the council's adoption of the self-imposed 20,000 houses number cannot be considered to be an exceptional set of circumstances, but is merely part of their 'aspirations'.

LOSS OF COMMUNITY IDENTITY: NPPF states that merging of communities is to be prevented, yet development of these greenbelt sites will lose the individual identities currently held between the areas in which they are located. For example, the historical villages of Walton, Moore, Daresbury and the large hub village of Stockton Heath would be effectively be knitted together, resulting in a loss of individual community identity.

LACK OF INFRASTRUCTRE: NPPF states that infrastructure must come first, yet the outline ideas drastically fails to understand the activities and behaviours of the local area. The idea that new residents will flock to Warrington Town Centre rather than the local, thriving adjutant Village of Stockton Heath is highly unrealistic proposition.

The current villages of Walton, Moore, Daresbury, Appleton and Hatton use Stockton Heath Village as its hub for commercial and leisure activities. The presence of 1,800 homes in Walton and others in the local area would effectively 'swamp' the village of Stockton Heath, destroying its character, overwhelming its infrastructure and usefulness as central village hub for the outlying villages in the area.

In addition, significant amounts of through traffic pass through Stockton Heath in order to access Bridgewater High School, Grappenhall, Lymm and the M56, M6 and M62 junctions. The village is already at capacity during rush hour. Due to the location and layout of Stockton Heath, infrastructure improvements on the scale required would be almost impossible to achieve and have not been included in the development plans analysis.

LACK OF MEDICAL INFRASTRUCTRE: There are currently no plans whatsoever to develop a new Hospital to accommodate the increase a 20,000 home development plan would have to the population of South Warrington. Warrington Hospital is arguably at capacity, with long A&E waiting times and as a hospital located in the North of the town, has very poor access for residents of South Warrington.

INABILITY TO COPE WITH TRAFFIC: Whilst the A56 dual carriage way may provide an arterial access route, the end destinations of Stockton Heath Village and the M56 motorway are already a bottleneck and suffer from significant congestion and resulting poor air quality.

DESTRUCTION OF HABITATS: With particular reference to the view of Peel Holdings that the Higher Walton site provides a moderate contribution to the Green Belt, as a local resident who is active in the area, I strongly contest this claim.

The Higher Walton site identified is host to different species of bats, owls, hawks, foxes, badgers and a huge array of wildlife that will perish as a result of the proposed development and the destruction of their natural habitats. Significantly the Peel analysis underplays the existence of hedgerows that exist in the area that would disappear as a result of the development.

DESTRUCTION OF AGRICULTURAL LAND: With particular reference to the view of Peel Holdings that the Higher Walton site provides a moderate contribution to the Green Belt, this claim must be contested. The Higher Walton site is currently professionally farmed, and contributes to the food growing capability of the UK. With uncertainties surrounding EU food imports due to Brexit, it would be foolish to grant any plans that choose to build houses on land, currently used to grow food for the local population.

REMOVAL OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT WITH COUNTRYSIDE: The Green Belt that connects the villages of Walton, Daresbury and Moore is of significant outstanding natural beauty and is widely used by the community for walking, cycling, horse riding and boating. The unique rural setting provided by the green belt provides the local community with a meaningful way to connect with the natural environment.

DESTRUCTION OF NATURAL VIEWS: The combined fields connects the villages of Walton, Daresbury and Moore is an integral part of the landscape. If developed on, this connection local people have with their natural environment will be lost forever.

DESTRUCTION OF SITE OF LOCAL HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE: The site of Grange Green Manor, located within the middle of the proposed Higher Walton development was established in 1850 and was at the time, one of the UK's first 'modern farms' using key developments from the industrial revolution such as steam power to be a thriving, experimental modern farm. The Grange Green site is a locally listed and historical landmark with links nearby Walton Manor and medieval ear, Norton Priory. Surrounding the site with 1,800 modern homes would destroy the unique character of the site and its standing as a historically relevant building forever.

QUESTIONABLE BENEFIT TO THE TOWN OF WARRINGTON: Due to the cost of land in the area and from research on similar developments and house prices in the area. The average cost of a 4 bedroom family home would be in excess of £525,000.00 should the development go ahead. Commercial developments currently underway in Warrington are creating jobs such as factory work at distribution centres and are at the lower end of the pay scale. Indeed, many of these jobs are forecasted to be lost to automation, artificial intelligence and robotics.

Due to the proximity of the Higher Walton site to the M56 and M6 motorways, it is therefore highly likely that that new residents to the area, who could afford the £525,000.00 house prices are not likely to work in the Town and would not bring economic benefits to the struggling Warrington town centre. The 1,800 home sacrifice of the green belt in Higher Walton would be to the benefit of commutable nearby City's' such as Manchester, Chester and Liverpool.

On these and other grounds, we sincerely hope that you are able to act on our behalf and reject the progression of these greenbelt sites within the development proposals.

Please keep me informed of the public examinations, submission of the plans and potential outcome of the review.

In particular, please can you keep me informed with regards to the Fiddlers Ferry power station and its ability to contribute to the towns growth and housing needs.

Yours faithfully,

Paul Hennessey

(Warrington resident [REDACTED])

[REDACTED]

Tel: [REDACTED]