

**Response to the  
'Proposed Submission Version Local Plan,'  
and the Local Transport Plan 4  
From Cllr. Peter Walker  
Borough & Parish Councillor for Stockton Heath**

**Introduction**

Stockton Heath, which I represent as Borough Councillor, is a village in south Warrington. The northern boundary of the village is the Manchester Ship Canal (MSC) and the southern boundary is the Bridgewater Canal. The A49 road runs approximately north/south through the village and the A56 east west. They cross in the village centre. The A49 crosses the MSC via a swing bridge which was installed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Through traffic and swing bridge closures frequently cause congestion and stationary vehicles.

I responded to the regulation 18 consultation on the Preferred Development Option in September 2017. My view is that the PSV Local Plan has not effectively addressed many of the issues I expressed in 2017 and I do not consider that WBC has demonstrated that the PSVLP is sound and achievable.

**The Borough Council has not convincingly shown that:**

- the number of houses, the Plan is designed to accommodate, are needed,
- there are exceptional circumstances which justify the release of any green belt land in Warrington,
- there are sufficient safeguards to prevent green belt land, should it be released, from being developed before the supporting infrastructure has been secured,
- the supporting transport infrastructure proposals are adequate or can be funded,
- the already frequently congested A49 and A56 will be able to absorb the additional traffic, which over 7,100 additional houses (up to 2041) in the south of Warrington will generate, without causing even greater congestion,
- the already compromised quality of air in Stockton Heath Village will not deteriorate even further.

**Air quality**

The World Health Organisation, in a report published in May, 2018, said that Warrington had the highest levels of air borne particles, PM2.5, in any town or city in the UK. The level in Warrington was measured at 14micro grams per cubic meter which exceeds the WHO limit of 10.

Particulate pollution from vehicles is not currently measured by the Borough Council anywhere in Warrington (with the exception of the DEFRA background site in Great Sankey), although NO<sub>2</sub> is. Stockton Heath village is at the beginning of an AQMA (air quality management area). NO<sub>2</sub> content in the air in the village is, at times, above what is set as the maximum for residential areas (it should be noted that the centre of Stockton Heath is classed as retail). I fear that PM<sub>2.5</sub> in Stockton Heath could also be above WHO limits

I do not accept the argument, in the Local Transport Plan, that the switch to electric powered vehicles will offset the polluting effect of more traffic. A switch to all electric vehicles will not take place until well after the Plan period and, in any case, electric vehicles will produce particulate pollution from brakes, tyres and the road surface just as vehicles powered by the internal combustion engine do.

### **Housing Numbers**

The Borough's own 'Housing Strategy 2018-2028' document, which has informed the Plan, states, based on population forecasts, that Warrington would need 600 additional houses per year up to up to 2037. It is difficult to understand why the Borough believes that 945 new houses per year, over the 20 year period, are required.

I understand that Central Government has said that the Borough should expand the Town by at least 909 houses per year. The plan states that there is sufficient brown field land available to accommodate 13,700 new homes. A plan covering 15 years instead of 20 would satisfy Central Government's requirements (15 times 909 = 13,635) without the need to release green belt land. Over a 15 year period further brown field sites may well become available: for example Fiddlers Ferry and, possibly, the Warrington Hospital site.

The risk, with the Proposed Plan, will be that developers will choose the most profitable land (ie green belt) to build on. The green belt will be lost forever unnecessarily.

### **Green belt release**

Central Government has stated the green belt land should only be released under exceptional circumstances. I believe that the Borough has not demonstrated exceptional circumstances. A 15 year Plan would not require the release of green belt land for the building of dwellings. The emergence of additional brown field sites during that period could mean that Warrington's green belt would be able to be protected for even longer.

### **Transport Infrastructure**

The addition of 7,100 houses in the 'Garden Suburb', proposed for south Warrington (5,100 during the Plan period) will generate significant additional vehicular traffic onto the already

congested A49 and A56 which run through Stockton Heath village. There appear to be no firm (or funded) plans to improve connectivity between the proposed new 'garden suburb' in south Warrington and the north. The town's two railway stations, most of the employment areas, the major retail outlets and entertainment areas are in the north. The proposed new western link, which was originally intended only to relieve the Town centre from through traffic approaching from the west, will not provide this connectivity.

I noted in para 2.1.10 of the Plan, Evolution of Warrington, that the Warrington New Town Outline Plan strategy set in 1973 was to expand the Town from a population of 120,000 to 200,000. The narrative should also have mentioned that the New Town Development Corporation was also planning to construct an express way from Stretton (M56) in the south of the Town, across the Bridgewater canal, the Manchester Ship canal, via a new high level bridge, the river Mersey and railway lines, and then splitting to link to the M62 and M6. This would be built before large scale building projects would begin and was regarded as necessary to cope with the additional traffic the population and industrial growth would generate.

The New Town project was closed before it could complete its strategy. The express way was not built and meanwhile the Town has grown to a population of 210,000. The A49, A56 and A50 still all cross the Manchester Ship Canal using 19<sup>th</sup> century swing bridges.

I find it difficult to understand how it is now considered possible for the Town to grow to a population of nearly 230,000 without confirmed and funded plans to improve movement between north and south.

### **Employment Areas**

The new employment areas, to be allocated on green belt land in the south, are likely to be predominately warehousing and distribution, which the proximity of the motor ways encourages. This is unlikely to generate a sufficient number of new jobs to create employment for many of the residents in the new local garden suburb. A predominance of walking and cycling to work will not happen. There will, however, be a significant increase in the number of HGV movements.

### **Other supporting infrastructure**

Although the Plan will identify land allocated for schools, medical centres, retail outlets etc., the Plan can have no influence in determining when these facilities will appear if ever.

### **Summary**

I believe that the Council has not demonstrated that the numbers of houses proposed to be built over the period of the Plan, 945 per year, are needed. The release of green belt to the

south of Stockton Heath, to allow 5,100 houses to be built, to form the new 'garden suburb', which would be necessary to achieve this number, is not necessary. The exceptional circumstances, which Central Government require for green belt release, have not been demonstrated.

A less ambitious 15 year plan could satisfy the Government requirement of 909 house builds per year without releasing any green belt in Warrington. I doubt if even 909 houses per year will be built, however, because there will not be the demand for them.

The transport proposals are not robust enough to prevent even more traffic congestion in the Town and, of particular concern to me in Stockton Heath village, should the housing numbers and employment proposals in the Plan take place.

Air quality, already at times above acceptable limits in the village, will deteriorate further.

**I request that I be allowed to speak about my concerns at the enquiry in public.**