

Derek Ellison

Sunday, 26 May 2019

Dear Sir or Madam

I have downloaded and done my best to read and consider the Local Plan: Proposed submission version in a balanced manner. I can see that Warrington is growing, and I'm pleased that we have ambitious plans to further develop the prosperity of our town. However, I regret to inform you that I strongly object to the local plan in its current form. Firstly, I struggle to understand the basis of the calculation for the requirement of so many new homes (18,900). It's claimed that this is the government's minimum requirement, but I can't see how this is calculated and I have heard other estimates that are much lower. Secondly, I also struggle to understand how the projections for economic growth have been made. These things are not adequately justified or explained.

However, my specific key objections to the planned developments are the following:

1. Damage to the green belt. I can't see how the plan merits the disruption to wild life and habitats and meets the necessary criteria for release of green belt land – which I believe to be preventing the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas or assisting in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. Rather I strongly believe that urban or brown field sites should be redeveloped. There are many such areas in our town which are begging for creative redevelopment. We need to bring back high-quality living environments and leisure activities to the town centre not drive people even further away into 'garden suburbs'. I know the plan does include development of some such sites but the weighting against green belt land seems highly disproportionate. Green belt land should be a last resort and I am not satisfied that the development planning has been rigorous or creative enough in considering non green belt options.

2. Too much traffic and the resulting unhealthy environment. I am concerned at the poor air quality in Warrington. I spend far too long sitting in traffic jams trying to exit Appleton on the A49 by the Cat and Lion every morning and too many hours sitting in traffic jams around the town centre during the working week and weekend. I can't believe that the council is considering building such large numbers of new houses, plus the proposed employment areas without putting infrastructure investments in first. First improve the the quality of life, reduce pollution and show that we have a sustainable road network that can cope with additional traffic and loads, then expand the housing and employment areas. Don't put the cart before the horse! Losing green space will only make the environment and pollution worse.

As an illustration, I attend a regular [REDACTED] committee meeting in London with a government agency, the [REDACTED] where I represent a UK trade body. In a recent break discussion the subject of Warrington traffic came up. Several other committee members are required to drive into Warrington for offices regularly, some infrequently. However, it seems Warrington traffic is legendary! one member spends 90 minutes commuting each into Warrington from his home in Cheshire and last hour is spent just in the last 5-10 miles getting into Warrington. The town was openly mocked for its dreadful infrastructure, roads and transport. People cited how they would go to any lengths to avoid driving through or commuting to Warrington. One was seriously considering changing jobs to avoid it. If you are truly ambitious for Warrington you will put this right before trying to increase road use through new business parks, low value distribution centres (Stobbars) and more housing. Nothing in the local plan makes me think any serious work has gone into fixing this.

3. Poorly thought out infrastructure development. The local plan is ambitious in scope, but I believe it would be reckless to proceed without much more careful planning around infrastructure investment and services. Where will the new schools be located? and doctors' surgeries? what about community centres, churches and preserving the current local village communities. We have never lived in such a networked age and yet people have never been so lonely, or rates of anxiety and depression been so high. The sense of community and green spaces are critical for emotional well-being and health. Much more thought is needed around building communities that sustain and support.

In summary despite the size of the document, it is lacking detail and specifics. I am concerned that the plan is unsound - the detail and rigour required for something of this scope and magnitude is lacking. This means that it is also undeliverable. We need the infrastructure investments to happen first or it's going to be a disaster.

yours faithfully,

Derek Ellison