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27th September 2017

Dear Sir

Re: Objection to Warrington Borough Council Local Plan – Preferred Development Option

I am writing to voice my strong objections to the proposed Preferred Development Option (PDO).

I feel that this plan is unsustainable without expensive and destructive road building that will destroy precious Green Belt land forever. I feel strongly that this has implications for the whole town, not just the areas that are identified for development.

While I understand the need for increasing the housing stock within the town, I believe that the scale and scope of the PDO goes way beyond that required by the Government and beyond the level required in the area. The scale of development seems to be driven by the Council's desire to become a city – something not necessarily shared by the town's residents.

I object to the Preferred Development Plan (PDO) in its current form for a number of reasons:

1. Significant loss of Green Belt land

The Plan includes release of Green Belt land to support the building of over 9,000 homes. However, Paragraph 83 of the National Planning Policy Framework indicates that established Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in 'exceptional circumstances'. It is not clear from the PDO why Warrington Borough Council (WBC) believes these are exceptional circumstances as no reasons are given.

The land was designated Green Belt to act as a barrier to protect the area, to check unrestricted sprawl and prevent towns merging, so safeguarding the countryside and preserve the setting of towns. The PDO looks to destroy this without clearly outlining the 'exceptional circumstances' by which the boundaries should be altered. For these reasons, Green Belt release should not be considered in the Council's PDO.

This is an issue that affects the whole of Warrington and it is not only a South Warrington issue.

Brown Field sites should be exhausted before any building is permitted on Green Belt land. There are large Brown Field sites that should be considered for development before Green Belt land is destroyed forever. These sites are likely to be released within the 20-year period of the plan which I believe have not been taken into account. For example, Fiddlers Ferry is nearing the end of its operational life and Warrington Hospital could be planning to move to a new site. These areas could make a significant contribution to the town's housing needs, so sparing the Green Belt that is so important for Warrington and its residents.

WBC have used a housing density of 30 dwellings per hectare throughout the PDO. This surely does not reflect the differences in housing stock that is required. For example, a higher density of 40 dwellings per hectare may be more appropriate in some places, such as apartments in the Town Centre. This would relieve pressure to use Green Field sites.

2. Desire for City status

In the Plan, the Council's desire for Warrington to become a city is given as one reason for the high housing and employment targets. There has been no consultation on this move to become a city, one that appears to be solely driven by the Council. The aspirations of WBC to become a city are not necessarily shared by residents. Such aspirations appear to be driving higher housing and employment assumptions than may otherwise be necessary or realistic. Surely before this goes any further there needs to be wider discussion and consultation with residents in the town as to whether they want to strive for city status.

WBC's desire for 'City' status appears to be driving unrealistic growth in Warrington. The Plan seems to be based on an assumption that 1,113 new homes should be built per annum over the next 20 years, amounting to around 24,000 new homes in total. I would like to understand why WBC feels housing of this level is required when it is higher than that required under Government guidance. A lower, more realistic figure reflecting population growth in Warrington would significantly reduce the pressure on Green Belt land.

3. The scale of the South Garden Suburb

The size of the proposed Garden City Suburb would completely change the character of the area and destroy the history, heritage and individual identity of the villages affected. Smaller settlements such as Appleton Thorn, Walton, Stretton and Grappenhall Village, which currently have their own identities and discrete areas separated by fields, will be engulfed in one huge urban area. The ability to access and enjoy green space is an amenity in itself, and the loss of such a significant amount of green space will be detrimental to all residents, not just local ones. The loss of this green space is in no way compensated for by the creation of green areas and parks in the plan.

4. Traffic Issues

Traffic is a serious concern already in south Warrington and the plan does little to address this. Warrington's position close to several major motorways results in the traffic situation becoming extreme whenever there are issues on the motorways, which is frequently. The traffic avoiding the toll from the new Mersey crossing and the extra traffic from so many houses will make gridlock more likely. Any assertion that people will use public transport to get to work or the assumption that each property will only have one car is at best naïve and at worse intentionally misleading.

The issue of increased traffic will have a huge impact on areas such as Stockton Heath. Though ignored in the Plan, the adverse impact of the extra housing in Appleton and Walton and the traffic generated, will be enormous on the village. Currently roads are frequently at a standstill and junctions are already at capacity. This has an obvious negative impact on air quality in the village and surrounding area. The proposed increase in housing will only increase pollution and the planned new roads will only serve to shift the pollution to other areas, not deal with the traffic congestion in the first place. There needs to be a high-level traffic survey done to assess the impact on the area and included in any future plans.

An 'Eastern Link' from M56 Junction 10 to the north of the Manchester Ship Canal is one of the roads suggested in the Plan. This cuts right through the proposed new residential areas. Ignoring the pollution, noise and health issues associated with taking a major road through an area of high population, such a road would attract extra traffic trying to avoid problems on the M6/M56 so increasing traffic in the area even more. The 2016 study by the World Health Organisation stated that Warrington was recorded as having the second highest air pollution levels in the North West. Why would the Council want to increase pollution further by proposing this scale of housing and associated car ownership?

The Plan also suggests using the old railway embankment west of Latchford Locks as a new strategic transport route. This route would be detrimental to

the people currently living in the is area. In addition to this, the Trans Pennine Trail is a key amenity in the area and is well used by walkers, runners and cyclists. Any development here would not only remove an important recreational area, it would also adversely impact wildlife in the area and destroy the habitats of protected species.

None of these routes seem to have been seriously assessed.

5. Environmental Impact

The environmental impact of the PDO is huge and does not seem to have been seriously assessed. No high level environmental and ecological impact survey is included in the Plan. Protecting wildlife matters and a wide variety of animals and birds live in the Green Belt area. South Warrington's countryside is being unfairly targeted.

6. Healthcare

Warrington and Halton hospitals are already operating at or near capacity, as are most of the town's GP practices and Medical Centres. The proposed 24,000 extra houses would mean a huge increase in population and requirement for more medical services. While the Plan promises new health facilities the Council is not able to provide these. This would depend in the NHS, the availability of staff, increased hospital capacity and most importantly funding, not only at the start but on-going. This has not been addressed in the Plan.

For all of these reasons I strongly oppose Warrington Borough Council's Preferred Development Plan. I believe that most of Warrington's Green Belt could be preserved by scaling back on the planned housing and employment numbers and better use of Brown Field sites. This massive increase in the size of the town is neither necessary nor wanted and I hope that the Council listens to the views of its residents who will be directly affected by these plans as well as recent Government guidance on housing levels.

Yours faithfully,

