

Response to Main Modifications to Warrington's Local Plan from Clifford Taylor

I refer to the Main Modifications made to Warrington's Local Plan issued on March 15, 2023. I am aware of the representations on that subject made by Groves Town Planning on behalf of SWP (the South Warrington Parishes Local Plan Working Group), and the representations made by Grappenhall and Thelwall Parish Council on April 21. I support both those representations.

I wish to amplify the arguments made by Groves Town Planning specifically on the issue that the Main Modifications to the Local Plan, in section 3.4.10, continues to show Thelwall Heys as a site to be used for housing in spite of the fact that it is in the Green Belt.

The Thelwall Heys site is probably the finest piece of Warrington's Green Belt. It is bounded by the Transpennine Trail on its north side, and the Bridgewater Canal to the south. It stretches from Pickering Bridge to the A50 Knutsford Road. The canalside walk to the west from Pickering Bridge is beautiful and rural with a tranquil atmosphere and with extensive open views to the north and west across Thelwall Heys itself. Thelwall Heys is in the Green Belt because it possesses the key quality of openness. Because of its position, that openness is experienced by the public. To build 310 houses on Thelwall Heys - as proposed in the Main Modifications - will mean a complete loss of that openness – the Green Belt in this area will simply cease to function.

The Borough Council however asserts that 'land at Thelwall Heys will provide much-needed homes in a sustainable location early in the Plan Period without having a material impact on the functioning of Warrington's Green Belt in this area'; but that statement is simply not credible to anyone who has ever visited Thelwall Heys. It is plainly inaccurate.

Furthermore, the Borough Council has not set out what the specific exceptional circumstances are for the removal of Thelwall Heys from the Green Belt. There is no evidence that in preparing its Main Modifications the Borough Council has considered the impact on local housing needs of the deletion of the South East Warrington Employment Area from the Local Plan. The SEWEA was a major feature of the Local Plan as originally submitted and so close to Thelwall Heys that it seems hardly credible that nearby housing requirements would be unaffected by its deletion. In short, it would appear that the SEWEA has been deleted from the Local Plan as required by the inspectors, but that the knock-on effects of that deletion on the rest of the original Plan have not been thoroughly considered. This would appear to call into question the soundness of the Local Plan as amended by the Main Modifications.

There are also other flaws in the Borough Council's case regarding Thelwall Heys - - the justification for removal of land from the Green Belt throughout Warrington as a whole relies entirely on the predicted requirement for housing going forward. Housing

targets currently being used by the Council look inflated and unachievable when one looks at past performance and it makes little sense to commit to use a prime piece of Green Belt for housing at a time when changes to the method of housing calculations are already under way in government. There is substantial doubt about the housing numbers used to drive the Local Plan and in my opinion Thelwall Heys should not be released from the Green Belt for housing until doubt is removed, all non-Green Belt options, such as the Fiddler's Ferry site, have been exhausted, and the exceptional circumstances are clearly defined.

- there is no evidence in the Main Modifications that the Borough Council has taken into account the availability of nearby land with existing permissions
- there is no evidence in the Main Modifications that the Borough Council has considered in enough detail the implications for infrastructure with respect to using Thelwall Heys for housing, especially as it is proposed to develop the site early in the Plan Period. Is there not a need to consider highways issues in detail now, and establish that existing schools and medical facilities are adequate?

Clifford Taylor (Resident of Thelwall and a Parish Councillor for Thelwall)

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April 26, 2023