

A New Plan for a Changing World

A Report by the South Warrington Parishes Local Plan Working Group (SWP)

September 2020

1. INTRODUCTION

Warrington Borough Council has spent the last 5 years preparing a new Local Plan. A coalition of South Warrington Parish Councils (SWP) was formed as this process started, to ensure that the views of residents across the south of the Borough were fully represented.

The SWP is wholly supportive of the need for the Borough Council to produce a Local Plan, to provide a guide for future development, but it believes that the current version is not fit for purpose.

The Local Plan must meet the aspirations and expectations of those that live and work in the Borough, but it should be based on a clear evidence base, should not overstate development needs based on unrealistic corporate ambition, and must first and foremost deliver development of the right kind, in the right places, in the right timeframes and critically with the right infrastructure in place.

The SWP produced a comprehensive critique of Preferred Submission Version (PSV) over the summer of 2019, concluding that as presented the plan did not meet the criteria to enable it to be considered as sound and deliverable – the tests it must meet to be approved by the Secretary of State of Housing, Communities and Local Government.



As it stands, it would seem that the Council is choosing to largely disregard those and many other similar objections from across the Borough and that the PSV, largely unaltered, will form the document presented to the Secretary of State.

Having considered all the recent external changes which will influence the way that development happens in Warrington and affect the way the Local Plan might work, the SWP believes more than ever that the Local Plan based on the PSV is not sound. It would not meet the tests applied by the Secretary of State in terms of delivery and viability. There is a real risk that the Local Plan will be rejected by the inspector and that the Council will be told to rethink the current proposals – that would be the worst possible outcome for everyone. We need a Local Plan that is not only approvable but that will ensure that development happens in a way that is best for the whole Borough.

2. THE TEST OF SOUNDNESS

In order to meet with the approval of the Secretary of State, the Plan has to be considered to be “sound.” It must be based on robust evidence. It must be viable. It must be deliverable. The SWP is concerned that the PSV will not meet this test for the following reasons.

- It is built around inflated housing numbers.
- It is the result of a weak strategy which relies entirely on growth driven by logistics-based (i.e. road-based) employment at out-of-town sites and housing development based on levels of house-building which are simply not credible when viewed in a historic context. To achieve the desired outcome, the rate of house-building would have to double compared with the average achieved in the last 10 years. The PSV does not explain how such a dramatic improvement can be achieved.
- A strategy based on road transport is undesirable for environmental and health reasons and is already outdated thinking.
- Large areas of Green Belt would be lost to house-building.
- It does not explain how, even if the housing goal was achieved, Warrington as a whole would benefit. In fact, it seems likely that the rest of the town would be neglected as resources are sucked in by the new housing. It would be harder for the town to fund its targets for education and health in the town as a whole. The present inequalities in the town would be exacerbated.
- It is no doubt hoped that some of the residents of the new Garden Suburb will either work in the new logistics facilities (unlikely) or in Manchester or Liverpool (road-based again, and strategically undesirable) and spend their money in Warrington. The obstacle to this is that Warrington is an unusual town bisected by three waterways which impede the flow of road-based traffic from south to north. The hope of reviving the Town Centre in this way would need to be supported by credible infrastructure proposals for improving south-north communications within the town. There are no such proposals in the current Local Plan.

The PSV is therefore likely to be found unsound at the EIP.



3. SWP'S OBJECTIONS TO THE PSV

SWP objected to the PSV because -

- It risked being found unsound;
- The PSV was too ambitious and expected growth above anything previously achieved, with limited evidence to support that expectation;
- The scale of new development which was consequently proposed meant that large areas of Green Belt across the whole Borough were to be released for development;
- The plan concentrated on placing new development on green field – previously undeveloped sites, rather than providing for regeneration and redevelopment of older, parts of the town;
- Whilst the Council needed to reflect Government requirements for the assessment of the number of new homes to built, the figures used in the PSV exceeded national requirements and proposed levels of house building at levels never previously reached in Warrington. The plan did not address Warrington's more obvious housing needs, but instead proposed large new suburbs and urban extensions. There was no clear plan as to how developers would be required to deliver the type of housing, in the right parts of the town, which would most benefit existing residents. In short, the numbers did not make sense but the location of new housing was even less understandable.
- The plan did nothing to promote the vitality of the town centre.
- Employment development was focused on large logistics-based development, largely road-based and with poor transport links to residential areas of the Borough. This made it hard to see how residents might benefit from new employment opportunities.
- The proposals were mostly based on the movement of people and goods via an already congested road network, with no clear plan for transport infrastructure requirements. There was no explanation of how and when those plans which were tabled could be delivered. New development mostly depended on existing roads and elderly bridges across canals, the Mersey and the Ship Canal.
- The PSV was not only short on detail about road infrastructure, but also about all the other facilities needed by a community; schools, hospitals, doctors and dentists. The PSV failed to show how new development could positively contribute to the improvement of existing infrastructure and did not show how inequality of access to facilities across the Borough could be remedied.
- The plan paid scant regard to issues of air quality and the acknowledged health issues resulting from increased vehicle usage.

In short, whilst fully accepting the challenges the Council faces, the SWP considers that the plan tabled in 2019 placed the wrong type of development in the wrong places and failed to show how development could be delivered in a way which would be of greatest benefit to the whole of the Borough.

4. A NEW PLAN FOR A CHANGING WORLD

There is an opportunity to step back and reconsider. The PSV should be withdrawn in response to the increased risk of being found unsound and to the changes that have occurred externally, which are set out below. It would be possible to produce in its place a sounder Local Plan, to the benefit of all the residents and businesses in the Borough, whilst achieving higher levels of consensus and credibility than currently exist. But also it would be possible for a new Local Plan to take into account some of the changes that have occurred externally in recent times.

Within the last year, external circumstances have changed dramatically. Covid-19 has changed everything. It is SWP's view that the flaws in the current plan as highlighted above, will expose the weaknesses of the PSV proposals to an even greater extent, simply because of the circumstances faced by the economy of the town, the North West and the Country. For a range of reasons, community expectations, aspirations and requirements are very different now, not only to the 2014 household projections and the 2016 evidence base used in the original version of the Local Plan, but even to the evidence used to support the 2019 PSV.

It is obvious to even the most casual observer that at the present time a number of significant factors are impacting on the way the residents of Warrington choose to live and work in comparison with circumstances which existed in 2019, let alone 2014. The most immediate of these is Covid-19. But there are others, all of which have progressed or developed since the PSV was prepared, such as; changes in the planning process, the economic recession, departure from the EU, the advent of HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail, availability of previously-developed sites in Warrington, LTP4, climate change and sustainability, the Town Centre, Port Warrington, viability and deliverability of the PSV, and inequality issues.

It is already possible to see some of the consequences of the Covid-19 Pandemic, and to discern its impact on our community and some of the issues that the Council must address

- The ongoing pandemic and all the ramifications for ensuring health and wellbeing, balancing existing inequalities, for working, travelling, going to school, spending leisure time, and shopping should be reviewed and considered in the context of how development might alter to meet the "new normal"
- Travel to work patterns have already changed and will continue to adjust. Users of office accommodation are seen to be reviewing their requirements, and re considering where and how their staff actually work.
- Trends in shopping practices were already altering but the way people shop seems to now be permanently changed.

LEAVING THE EU

- Uncertainty over whether/how the UK was to leave the EU was an issue which affected the timing of the release of the PSV. To some extent there still remains a considerable degree of uncertainty as to the practical implications of leaving as negotiations continue.
- As it stands, the Plan is based on an economic assessment which is not based on any level of understanding of how changes arising from Brexit might impact on business in Warrington. Any update to the evidence base used, to move the Plan forward to examination by a Government Inspector, is not being made available by the Council at the present time.

CHANGES TO THE PLANNING PROCESS

The Council should also prepare to respond to proposed changes in the planning process:-

- The Government is advocating major change to the planning system which governs where development takes place and how planning permission for that development is granted. This includes discussion over the best way to calculate how much housing needs to be supplied.
- Objection to the PSV highlighted concern that standard calculations overstated the need for housing in Warrington. New development on green field sites in the Green Belt has been supported on the basis that suburban development provided development which was financially viable for developers and thus enabled those developers to make a contribution to infrastructure requirements.
- The number and type, and the location of new housing previously proposed did not deliver what Warrington needs. It did not have the potential to improve the health and wellbeing of existing residents.
- The Council is already in a difficult position and is penalised for not allocating land for housing which meets the Government's calculations. The Council faces further challenge if housing is not delivered at the rate required to meet those housing numbers. In most cases the Council has very little control over how quickly house builders build.
- It may be considered that rather than committing to an undeliverable plan, housing numbers, types and locations should instead be reviewed and a new approach advocated, in line with emerging Government advice and legislation.
- The emerging process advocates a zoning-based model for future development plans. It is likely that any review of the plan will take place in a different statutory context than that which currently applies. Why not anticipate that process?
- A significant change to process would change the way of securing contributions from developers for infrastructure provision. At present the planning authority secures such provisions through a planning obligation – a S106 Agreement or through a Community Infrastructure Level based on a local charging schedule. The Planning White Paper suggests that this might change to a universally applied development levy.

ECONOMIC RECESSION

- There appears to be little real consensus as to how the economy will change as the result of unprecedented impacts across the world, but it would seem logical to anticipate some impact across the short term and early years of the period covered by the Local Plan.
- It is accepted that some changes may be transitional and shorter term, but it is clear that in the early years of the plan, levels of growth will be nothing like the levels expected by the Cheshire and Warrington Strategic Economic Plan. That Plan supported growth across Cheshire based on, amongst other things, continued investment in the aerospace and automotive sectors, both of which now look doubtful.
- Changes in working practice may reduce demand for office space across the Borough and it is necessary to review the potential impact of that reduced requirement.
- The logistics sector, on which most of Warrington's ambitions for growth are predicted will change. Is this still best served by ad hoc large-scale warehousing, road-based, with no scope for shift to alternative modes, based solely on a position close to a motorway junction?

HS2 / NORTHERN POWERHOUSE RAIL

- Since the issue of the PSV for consultation in March 2019, the Government has committed to the early stages of HS2. This project, as it moves forward, will have implications for Warrington.
- The Government has committed funding towards the delivery of projects under the banner of Northern Powerhouse Rail, including a new high speed route linking Leeds, Manchester and Liverpool. It would appear that there is increasing commitment to this route serving Warrington, with an interchange with the West Coast Mainline at Warrington.
- There is a realistic possibility of the formation of a major transportation hub based around the existing Bank Quay station. Even if the full operation of such a hub extends beyond the plan period, there is considerable scope to plan for redevelopment based on the regeneration opportunities presented by the formation of the hub, and the highly accessible and sustainable transport links which it promotes.
- The increases in capacity on the West Coast Mainline, released as HS2 takes long- distance passenger services over alternative routes, could have major implications for the use of rail, rather than road, as the preferred mode of transportation - particularly for freight.



AVAILABILITY OF PREVIOUSLY DEVELOPED SITES

- In the earliest stages of the plan there was legitimate uncertainty over the future of some of the large, already developed, sites across the Borough, and whether these sites might become available during the Plan period. But now there is more clarity.
- Fiddlers Ferry has ceased operation and cannot be dismissed as being unavailable or undevelopable within the Plan period.
- Parts of the Bank Quay site occupied by Crosfields would now appear to be surplus to requirements and available for redevelopment within the Plan period.
- It is understood that high-level discussion has accepted the principal of relocation of the hospital from its current Lovely Lane site.
- There is inevitability that the town centre will change, given the demise and decline of major high street retailers.
- Emerging Government policy, including that driven by development-led stimulation of economic activity, is likely to provide ambitious and forward thinking local authorities with the tools to prompt and facilitate development in ways not envisaged as the PSV was in draft.

PARKSIDE ST HELENS

■ St Helens Borough Council has supported an application for a large multi-modal rail freight interchange on the former Parkside Colliery site. The application has been referred to the Secretary of State for consideration. The outcome of this decision is an important consideration in the wider context of logistics provision within the M6/M62 corridor. The increased capacity for freight on the West Coast Main Line increases the potential benefits of a strategic rail freight interchange in the North West.

LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN 4

■ The presentation of the Local Plan and LTP4 for consultation at the same time was lauded as a piece of joined up and comprehensive thinking – linking new development with the transport infrastructure necessary to enable that development to operate sustainably, whilst simultaneously removing existing problems on the network. Whilst the principles of LTP4 have to some extent been accepted by the Council, it appears that there is considerable consensus that key components of the LTP would not be delivered in the Plan period, and potentially not at all.

■ There appears to be little certainty the SW link road from Chester Road to Sankey Bridges is viable. Its only purpose is to serve potential development land south west of the town centre, and to then place additional traffic on already congested parts of the highway network.

■ It may be considered that the LTP is already out of date as the pandemic has produced dramatic changes to ‘travel to work’ patterns and the consequent need for car and public transport use.

SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

■ There is agreement across the Council that climate change is an issue which needs to be addressed locally and that the Local Plan and LTP should reflect the Council’s declaration of a “Climate Emergency” in June 2019 and a Green Energy Strategy in September 2019.

■ This appears to be contradicted by a PSV which relies heavily on road-based transport, for both passengers and freight, and a generalised assumption that harmful emissions from vehicles will reduce, as technology uses cleaner fuels and alternatives to hydrocarbons. (This ignores pollution produced in production of more complex fuels and to charge electric vehicles).

■ The PSV pays insufficient regard to particulate emissions resulting from road vehicle use and the extremely harmful impact to human health which result. It is the more densely populated areas of the Borough on the key arterial routes, passing through areas with the highest instances of poor health, that will continue to suffer through this approach. Building new roads and advocating development wholly dependent on movement of goods by lorry, and people by car, is not an approach consistent with aspirations to contribute to the management of climate change, to improve health and reduce health-related inequalities.

TOWN CENTRE

- Warrington Town Centre has consistently failed to operate at a level consistent with the population of the Borough. This is a consequence of many factors such as the greater attraction of alternative destinations – Manchester, Liverpool and Chester; historic permissions for out of town shopping centres; a New Town Plan based on large district centres – Birchwood and Westbrook.
- Shopping patterns continue to adjust. Adjustment is accelerated by the strictures of lockdown and other Covid-related actions. Further change away from traditional High Street shopping, is accepted as inevitable.
- The Council has made strenuous efforts to ensure that major chain stores remain in place, but there are limits to the control and tools available.
- Office development is attracted to business park locations with only traditional public sector functions operating in the centre. The pandemic would seem to have resulted in a fundamental shift in patterns of employment, working from home and travel to work.
- The Local Plan creates an opportunity to re-invent the role of central Warrington and to build on recent development in the SE Quadrant.

PORT WARRINGTON

- The focus for development based on Port Warrington was initially referenced in the 2014 Core Strategy. Reconnection to the main rail network was subsequently granted planning permission. There is no indication at the present time that the development of Port Warrington in fact plays any significant role in the operation of the Manchester Ship Canal. Investment in the Port of Liverpool with direct links to the railway network would seem to limit the need to trans-ship cargoes to smaller vessels for transport to Warrington and further transshipment to rail.
- There is no evidence that investment needed on the MSC would be forthcoming – e.g., space to turn vessels.

INEQUALITY

- The Council has consistently promoted planning policy, including the emerging Local Plan, as a mechanism for managing and resolving inequalities across the Borough.
- The pandemic has illustrated and exacerbated the consequences of such inequalities, with poorer health, social wellbeing, access to work and educational standards being of particular concern in the more deprived wards of the Borough.
- The Plan does nothing to resolve these issues. New employment opportunities are in fact placed as far away from those seeking work as possible. New road systems unload on to the existing network in the most congested parts of the network – mostly within Wards in the centre of the Borough. Existing residents in these areas will be the least likely to benefit from new infrastructure provision, schools, health facilities, green spaces etc., and be most exposed to issues arising from poor air quality. New development in the wrong place will not provide opportunity for aspiration to move to improved accommodation without significant translocation. New development in the wrong place served largely by road based transport will increase health inequalities.
- There is an opportunity to review the Plan and to reconsider its impact on equality.

VIABILITY AND DELIVERABILITY

- The housing market is fickle – especially in the current climate, and there is no evidence that new development – even on green field sites - can support the Council’s expectations for infrastructure delivery across the Borough.
- The Council’s Plan is dependent on developer contributions, through planning obligations or Community Infrastructure Levy, to provide local funding for infrastructure provision.
- There is no evidence to demonstrate that the Council can attract such levels of funding from other sources such as Central Government, to make developer contributions towards infrastructure provision unnecessary.
- The infrastructure requirements of the Plan are extensive, complex and costly. The Plan offers the prospect of the highest standards of development in terms of design quality, sense of place, landscaping etc. It should be made clear how this can be delivered.
- The scale and cost of infrastructure provision is not obviously assessed within the Plan and it is considered that the cost of new roads, bridges across the Ship Canal, health facilities, schools, community facilities, public open spaces, green spaces, affordable housing etc., has not been fully assessed in order to understand infrastructure costs. It is necessary for a Local Plan to show that the infrastructure it requires can be secured at the same level as the development which it serves.
- The developers’ objective is principally to make a profit. House builders will inevitably seek to challenge demands and requirements for contributions on the basis of limits in the viability of their proposals. Poor ground conditions, expensive drainage solutions and land values will all play a role in viability appraisal of developments and the ability of developers to accommodate all of the requirements of the LPA.
- Under current national policy, the scope for developers to deliver the scale of affordable housing suggested by the Plan is restricted.
- The PSV is in no small part predicated on the delivery of infrastructure not only to meet the needs of new development, but also to support potential resolution to existing problems.
- Planning permissions are in place for developments across Warrington. Some of these permissions have been in place for a number of years, but development only comes forward when this suits the developer. Developers will only build new houses which they can quickly sell. This makes it very difficult for the Council to ensure that development takes place at the rate anticipated in the PSV. Developers will not release funding for infrastructure in advance of development. It will therefore be extremely challenging to ensure that infrastructure can be provided until much of the development is in place. There is a disconnection between new development and the timing of providing the infrastructure needed to properly support that development.
- Further review of the Plan in the knowledge of responses to consultation would appear opportune at this time.



5. A NEW APPROACH

There is a window of opportunity to avoid the mistake of pursuing a document which is based on outdated and flawed evidence and to adjust the Proposed Submission Version of the Plan and to create produce an effective updated Local Plan which benefits from consensual support across the Borough.

Rather than an overly ambitious Local Plan which tries to maximise growth, with an ill- considered approach to infrastructure delivery, a revised Plan could focus on using existing infrastructure in new and different ways to the maximum benefit of existing business and residents.

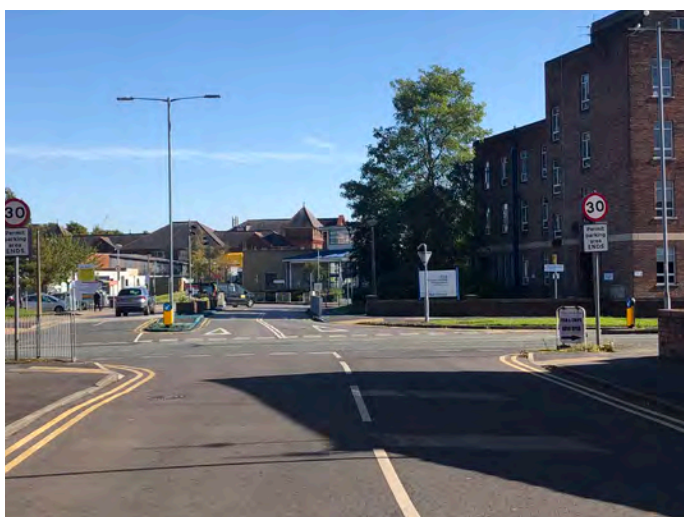
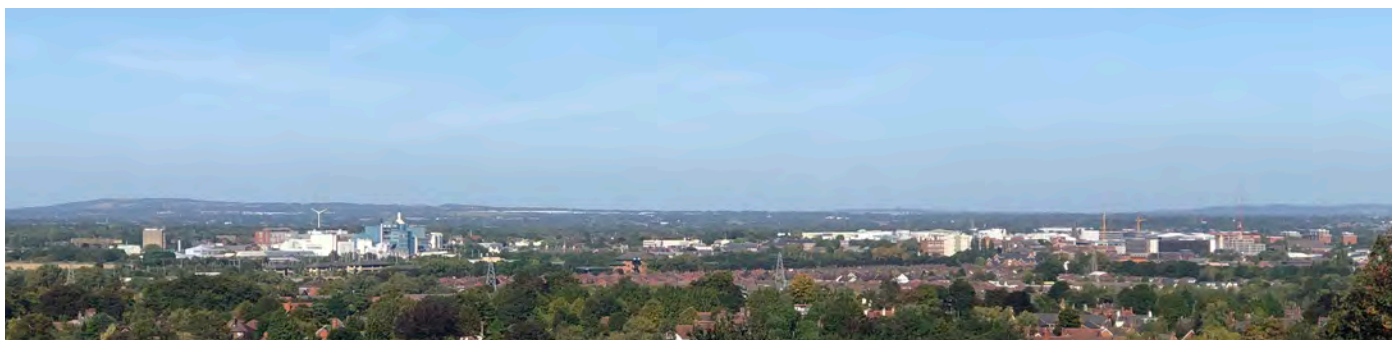
Rather than a plan reacting to developer aspirations which bring little or no benefit to Warrington, a revised plan could seek to focus the Council's powers and legislative controls to promote and facilitate development in the right places, where the needs and requirements of Warrington residents and businesses are best accommodated.

Rather than spread development into Green Belt, subsuming villages in the north and south of the Borough, a revised Local Plan could focus on re-establishing the town centre at the core of town, promoting redevelopment of existing, previously developed sites.

The location of new development should reflect access to existing rail infrastructure, not locations which are wholly dependent on road use, with the consequences for congestion and air quality which would inevitably result.

The following sections detail what steps the Council should consider in developing a new Local Plan.





ECONOMY AND EMPLOYMENT

The Council should:

- Accept that a post-Covid downturn in the economy will impact on previously anticipated levels of growth, with consequent changes in the patterns of demand for office and employment space.
- Review reasons for accepting logistics-based development simply because of location close to the motorway – and instead place established sources of employees and where there is scope to focus on multi-modal means of transport.
- Acknowledge that the market for logistics is not just Warrington-based, but regional, and that the extensive Green Belt release proposed in the PSV is not justified.
- Promote a mixed use regeneration area based around an enhanced transport hub focused on Bank Quay Station.
- Support rationalisation and remodelling of existing industrial estates.
- Support a Liverpool – Omega – Warrington – Birchwood professional services corridor based on a remodelled Cheshire Lines rail route.
- Support a Health Hub based around a new hospital in the town centre with facility for support and ancillary facilities.
- Support links to degree-level education facilities in town centre.
- Support a mixed-use energy-efficient hub, based around the Fiddlers Ferry site, with rail link for freight and passengers linking to Warrington and Widnes.
- Propose a mixed-use high-technology business hub based on land south of Bank Quay.
- Anticipate a zoning-based plan system.

HOUSING

The Council should:

- Remove any housing numbers above Government requirements.
- Reassess Plan Period and plan trajectory to provide realistic and deliverable housing supply model.
- Recalculate figures against emerging housing supply methodology.
- Review issues around household projection forecasts and consequences for using 2014 or 2016 ONS figures.
- Analyse historic patterns of delivery and reasons why, notwithstanding high levels of land availability, new housing is not delivered as expected.
- Review Urban Capacity Study in the light of additional release of brown field sites: Fiddlers Ferry, Crosfields, a vacated hospital site.
- It is anticipated that this approach has the potential to reduce housing supply targets to a figure more closely aligned with the existing figures quoted for the urban capacity for new development
- Include greater Town Centre Master Plan within the Local Plan to establish a statutory base for use of CPO and other powers to enable the Council to lead and facilitate development.
- Develop scope for town centre residential uses with clarity over form, design and density.
- Accept development on existing New Town sites and “finishing off” of Grappenhall Heys.
- Limit housing development in Green Belt settlements unless obvious rounding of existing settlement form or where housing provision is directed to a specifically identified local need. Focus opportunities for new affordable, family housing close to town centre with good access to transport and community infrastructure.





INFRASTRUCTURE

Transport

The Council should:

- Reassess the role of existing rail links – extend Merseyrail services to Warrington Central via Widnes – second tranche of new Merseyrail fleet will be capable of using battery power with no need for electrification from Hunts Cross and scope to operate on 25kv overhead and 750v third rail.
- Consider extension of Metrolink from Deansgate to Warrington as Sheffield Supertram.
- Consider reinstatement of rail/LRT Arpley to Altrincham via Lymm but note constraint of MSC crossing.
- Seek improved Chester to Leeds service via electrified Huddersfield route using bi-mode stock already in service.
- Consider a light rail shuttle Arpley to Widnes via Sankey Bridges Penketh and Fiddlers Ferry. Existing track bed capable of separate LRT and heavy goods tracks – potential links via Ditton into Liverpool.
- Explore the possibility that HS2 would run north from Crewe to Manchester Airport and Manchester Piccadilly. No requirement for Golborne Link with HS trains running over improved existing network from Crewe to the North via Bank Quay.
- Assume that new Manchester – Liverpool HS line would run via Manchester Airport, interchange with WCML at Warrington and onto Liverpool via Liverpool Airport/South Parkway. Potentially following Fiddlers Ferry line.
- Develop electric bus corridors, e.g; A49 Winwick to Stretton; Burtonwood and Omega to Culcheth via Birchwood; A56 corridor Walton/Lymm to Town centre via Latchford; A57 Corridor Hollins Green to Penketh.
- Explore the use of on-demand bus services – see Go-bus Sevenoaks

Roads

The Council should:

- Set up bus corridors designed to give bus priority – priority lanes and priority at traffic light controlled junctions.
- Research modest park and ride facilities at Fiddlers Ferry, Woolston and Lymm interchange.

KEY SITES

The Council should develop strategies for key sites based on the opportunities they offer along the following lines :

■ Cockhedge health hub – new hospital and health facilities – replaces ASDA and New Town House – direct links to bus and rail - parking at Golden Square. Ground floor retail space - office/admin hub easy rail and bus access from Halton. Related health education and business uses on Stadium Quarter development. High quality residential accommodation/key worker accommodation generating town centre residential activity. Links to ancillary facilities at Bank Street – potential use of redundant retail space in Golden Square. Linked private hospital with consultancy suites.

■ Hospital site – 11 ha. The former Thomas Locker site on Church Street was developed at 73 dwellings per hectare – similar development of the Hospital site would produce 800 dwellings. The site is well suited to deliver a wide range of housing types and tenures and is far more sustainably located than any green field site. Scope exists to review local primary school provision incorporating new buildings into the development or upgrading existing school accommodation in the area.

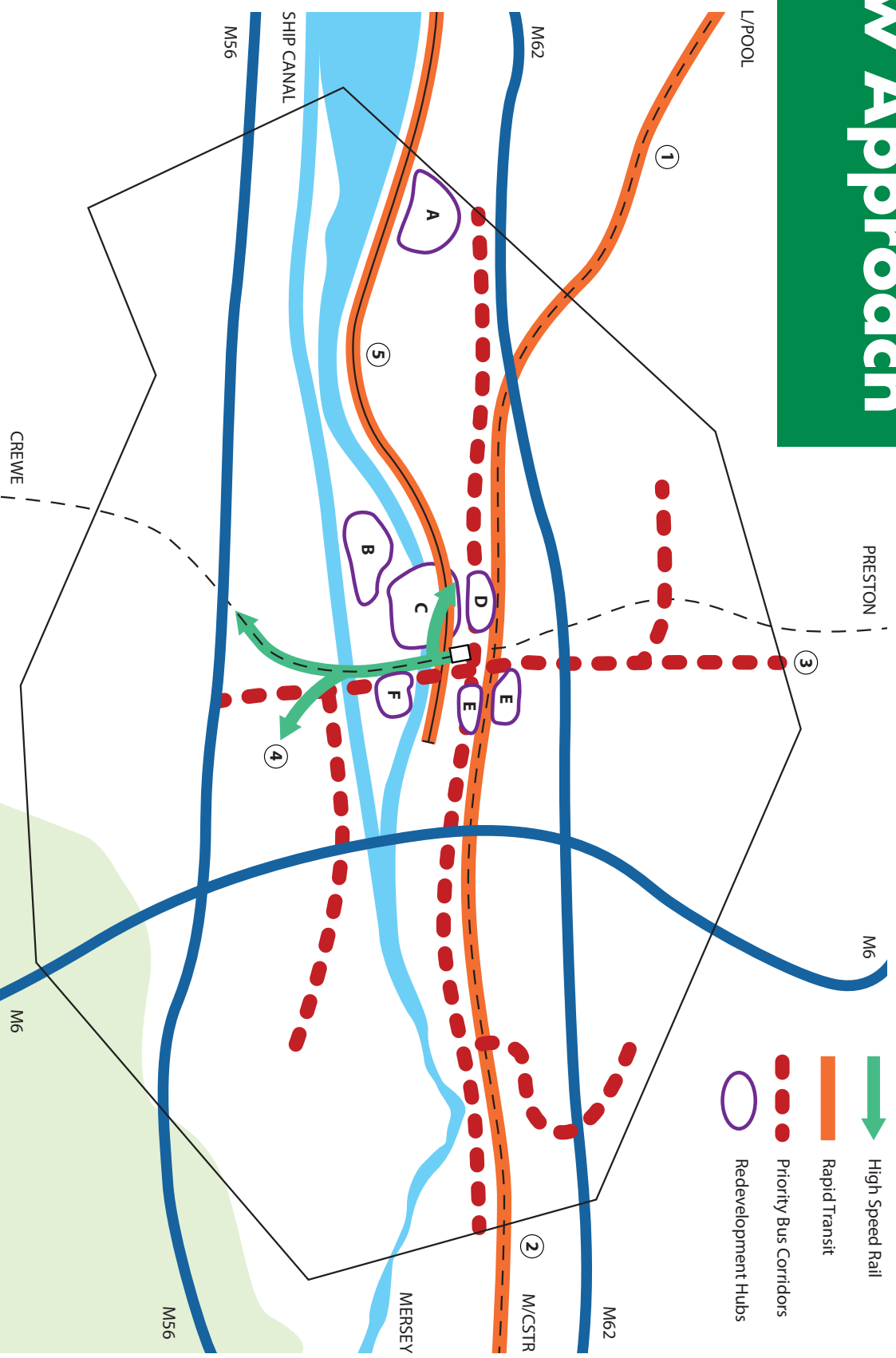
■ Fiddlers Ferry – 115ha. Recognise that some parts are not able to be developed. Scope for more contaminated parts of the site to be given over to logistics-based use with rail links. It may be necessary to consider improvement of the route from the site to the A557 and links to the M62 - this was considered acceptable to bring biomass materials to the power station before it closed. Scope to develop compact power generating plant to utilise existing connections to National Grid. Scope to utilise existing rail links. An equivalent power station site at Rugeley in Staffordshire has been the subject of applications for planning permission for 2300 dwellings 3 years after ceasing operation. Potential links to passenger rail on Widnes to Arpley line as above.

■ Crosfields, Bank Quay and Port Warrington – Port Warrington has always been constrained by the lack of reasonable road access. Taking account of the limitations of the site as a freight facility on the Ship Canal it would seem that assessment of the wider site, including Bank Quay would give scope to consider better access and a wider range of uses, including housing, without necessarily having to commit to the costly Western Link road. Site would have access to the Arpley railway line and to Bank Quay station, avoiding expensive and unrealistic relocation. The Master Plan for the area should be extended across the whole of the town centre, and the current hospital site, to provide a statutory development plan basis for development, and bring the land into control of the LA in terms of use of CPO and planning powers. The Master Plan should not be a supplementary planning document to be adopted at sometime after adoption of the main plan.

■ New town sites – it would be logical to review the exact extent of land in the control of Homes England which is not within the 2014 Green Belt, that is yet to be developed. There is some logic in completing pockets of development which relate to housing and infrastructure already in place. This would need to reflect the inability to deliver residential development of any scale as a result of the lack of existing infrastructure.



A New Approach



1. Extension to Mersey Rail – Hunts Cross > Warrington Central
2. Extension to Metrolink – Warrington Central > Deansgate
3. High priority electric bus route
4. Bank Quay Transport Hub high speed rail links – HS2 and NP Rail
5. Fiddlers Ferry/Widnes Light rail to Latchford

- A. Fiddlers Ferry regen hub
- B. Repurposed Port Warrington Arpley hub
- C. Bank Quay – regen/transport hub
- D. Hospital regen hub
- E. New Health hub
- F. Southern Gateway



6. CONCLUSIONS

There are two main criticisms of the PSV version of the Local Plan:

The scale and form of development proposed is wrong and it is in the wrong place. The PSV does nothing to focus activity on the town centre; a better Plan would rebalance inequality and opportunity and improve Warrington as a place to live and work.

The PSV is undeliverable. Most transport interventions are costly and ineffective road schemes. Even if resources could be found to build the new roads proposed, they would not solve any existing issues with traffic congestion or air quality, nor would they be adequate to meet the additional demands caused by new areas given over to development. The PSV simply perpetuates the 1960's New Town plan which was not completed precisely because it became outdated and too costly.

A new Local Plan along the lines of this report would recognise the changing world and refocus Warrington on its core, which is a highly-accessible central area with excellent transport connections for both local and longer distance journeys. It would lay the foundation for a town centre with all the facilities needed to serve a vibrant 21st century town – residential, work and community.

In this scenario, new homes and development focused on improving those parts of the town which need it most; enhancing the educational, social and community-based facilities and work opportunities for those living in areas of the town where disadvantage and lower standards of wellbeing persist. At the same time, the town's legacy of a protected Green Belt and open space would be preserved.

We believe our suggestions above could be used to produce a new Local Plan which is deliverable, and provides the Council with a better strategy for constructive and imaginative use of its planning and other powers to move the town forward to the middle of the century.