

# Housing Strategy Consultation

## Response from Stockton Heath Parish Council

The Parish Council (SHPC) comments are set out below.

1, The Strategy is a well researched document which describes both the national and the local housing situation in detail. In particular it points out how action by Central Government has allowed the number of houses per year being built to fall significantly below the numbers needed. This has caused house prices to rise at a faster rate than the ability of many people on average salaries to buy.

**Houses in Warrington are not affordable to many local people.**

2, SHPC considers that the Borough's Housing Strategy should inform the Local Plan development process (LPDP) and not the other way round. The Strategy includes information from the Preferred Development Option (PDO) which is part of the LPDP. This was produced some 18 months before the Strategy emerged for consultation.

**The housing strategy should be agreed before the Local Plan is developed.**

3, The strategy quotes the forecast from the Office for National Statistics for population growth in Warrington over the next 20 years to be 24,700. Using the factor of 2.3, this equates to the need in our town for an additional 10,739 houses or 537 per year. On the same page (P4) it quotes the PDO proposal to build 24,000 additional houses over the next 20 years or 1,200 per year. It does not challenge or attempt to explain this discrepancy.

**The difference between house builds to satisfy population growth and the PDO numbers should be challenged. There is no evidence that 24,000 new houses are needed in Warrington over the next 20 years.**

4, The evidence provided to support the numbers of houses needed in Warrington over the next 20 years is the forecast for population growth which equates to 537 houses per year (see 3 above). The Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) produced jointly by Warrington, St Helens and Halton indicates that 955 per houses per year are needed. This latter number is suspect as it has been 'updated to support the PDO'. The other housing number referred is 1,113 houses per year 'to meet the Council's growth aspirations' but that is not explained.

There is no reference to the 914 houses per year for Warrington referred to in the recent Central Government consultation document.

**The Housing Strategy should be clear on how many houses per year are required to be built in Warrington and provide evidence to support that number.**

5, Halton Borough Council is now developing its own Local Plan. It proposes a significant increase in house building in Moore which will join up with the PDO proposal to build 1,800 houses to the north of Walton.

**The Strategy should include working with neighbouring authorities to avoid continuous development across boundaries.**

6, The Strategy identifies that there is a significant shortfall in 'affordable' housing in Warrington, both to buy and to rent. It calculates that 288 affordable houses per year are required. The Strategy recognises that WBC is a land owner and might also be able to use its prudential borrowing powers to provide affordable housing. The current definition of affordability (80% of current rents and presumably mortgage repayments) will not provide truly affordable housing in all parts of Warrington and the definition needs to be refined.

WBC should consider using its own housing company to build houses on Council brownfield land, both for rent and for sale, which are available at prices which are affordable to Warrington families whose average income has been identified in the document. The various help schemes already in place and identified in the draft document will not by themselves deliver the 288 affordable house acquisitions (either for rent or purchase) needed.

The Borough is able to borrow long term and at low fixed interest rates from the Public Works Loan Board (for example, in November last year it borrowed £50m at a fixed rate of 2.57% over 39 years from the PWLB) and should use this facility to provide truly affordable houses for Warrington people.

**WBC should use its advantageous borrowing powers to build on Council owned brownfield land to provide truly affordable houses for Warrington people.**

7, The proposal to develop a 'brownfield' site register is welcome and this should also include those sites that can be reasonably expected to become available during the 20 year period of the Local Plan, such as Fiddlers Ferry and Warrington Hospital. Development on the Greenbelt should only be allowed if no 'brownfield' sites are available.

**The Strategy should guide the Local Plan process to avoid building on Greenfield land unless there is no 'brownfield' land available.**

8, The Warrington Housing Strategy should now include the guidance outlined in the Prime Minister's recent speech on the need to increase house building in the country. The speech promises to 'rewrite planning rules' to remove barriers to housing development. It also said that local authorities should 'only amend Green Belt boundaries if they have fully explored every other reasonable option'

**The Strategy should be amended to include the latest Government guidelines on housing development which includes the imperative to protect the green belt unless unavoidable.**