**LTP4/PSV Local Plan – Transport Concerns**

**1. Introduction**

Following the publication of the LTP4/PSV the RSWF Group felt it essential to undertake a critical view of the two documents in terms of transportation proposals for South Warrington

**2. Brief.**

The RSWF Sub Group undertakes a critical review of the LTP4/PSV in relationship to transport proposals and the potential impact on South Warrington.

**3. General Observations.**

Warrington’s Transport challenges derive fundamentally from densely packed roads caused by constraints arising from:

* 3 waterways: The River Mersey, The Manchester Ship Canal[MSC] and The Bridgewater Canal passing through or near to Stockton Heath and Warrington Town Centre.
* Nearby motorways: The M6 (N-S), M56 (E-W) and M62 (E-W).
* Existing Railway networks

Traffic congestion and resulting air pollution is a major concern and affects the whole Town so the maintenance and preservation of adequate green space is essential/vital in providing an air quality counterbalance. Data taken from the World Health Organisation [WHO] ambient air quality database published on the 29th May 2018 names Warrington as one of the top 5 towns/cities in England that exceeds the pollutant limit. This is a damning report on the Council and exposes the lack of care and safeguarding being afforded to Warrington residents. Therefore the proposed additional 7,230-plus dwellings in South Warrington will have a deleterious effect upon air quality and noise, particularly in congested locations such as Stockton Heath high Street and Latchford village. **The RSWF Group have also produced a separate report that focuses on Air Quality and the negative impact these Plans will have on Warrington residents.**

The LPT4 and Executive Summary define a high level approach to addressing the challenges of the many transport problems in and around Warrington. The document title states that it is a PLAN but does not contain sufficient realistic detail to give credibility to a plan. It appears to be futuristic and aspirational in its view to resolve the major and minor issues which face the town. Most of the transport initiatives are medium to long term investigations and not beneficial implementable plans and do not benefit or complement the Warrington PSV Local Plan in a timely manner.

Some aspects of the LTP4 might in time be realisable and some would be welcomed e.g. the use of much improved and safer public transport services, making it easier for the ‘last mile’ of journeys into the Town centre for pedestrians and the proposed Bridge Foot link proposal.

Lack of commitment; the schemes, or possible schemes, listed in the LTP4 document will, in total, cost a very significant sum. Given pressures on overall UK public expenditure, and specific pressures on the Department for Transport, particularly from major metropolitan areas close to Warrington, There is little prospect that no more than a very small fraction of Government funding could realistically be achieved in the timescale of the Local Plan [ 2017-2037]. Almost all of the LTP4 is an aspirational wish-list, and [partly due to the uncertainty of funding] no timescales whatsoever are offered regarding delivery. Indeed, most schemes/ideas are still marked down as for future consideration over the next 5 year, with no apparent detailed design work carried out to date and absolutely no commitment to programming

Discussions with Council traffic planners at the recent Councils consultation event have confirmed LTP4 as a ‘concept’ aspirational document which only outlines some options and some preferences. Therefore it lacks important detail for residents to make real judgements on the benefits a more detailed LTP4 plan might bring. If some of these options are eventually realised then attracting sufficient and constant funding for improved or new roads and bridges over waterways over the PSV period will be an enormous challenge in both phasing and funding.

Some of the LTP4 is dependent on securing significant changes in public behaviour, including walking, cycling and bus patronage. No evidence is offered, other than optimistic hope that these changes of mode, away from car usage, will in fact occur. It is ironic that the Council have presented the opposite showing trend patterns over the past decade showing a dramatic fall in bus usage

The LTP4 provides no credible strategy on how the Council intends to deal with and resolve existing highway congested pinch points. These include Stockton Heath High Street, Stockton Heath swing bridge, Lumb Brook Road Bridge, Knutsford Road Swing Bridge, the Latchford /Kingsway gyratory and the Bridgefoot/Bank Quay Rail Station area. Indeed some of the currently planned highway schemes may in fact worsen the situation. The Council’s traffic model is unrealistic, it assumes that the three swing bridges are continually in place and do not open. It also seems to assume that there are no disruptive road works anywhere in the Borough. There are other detailed reservations about the model, particularly in relation to Public transport. It is also far too optimistically based upon traffic surveys undertaken during a week in June when the weather /daylight are both favourable and when many non –school-age families are on holiday. A wet week in late November might bring a very different set of results

The PSV Local Plan housing strategy places a major emphasis upon creating two major residential settlements in South Warrington i.e. The Garden Suburb and Walton which are both South of the three waterways. In complete contrast the LPT4 openly admits that the preponderance of workplaces, such as Lingley Mere, Omega, Town Centre, Railway Stations, Gemini/Winwick Road Retail Park, Woolston Grange and Birchwood Science Park are North of the Three Waterways. This mismatch is wholly illogical, and is a recipe for growing and increasing intractable highway congestion.

The content of LTP4 will involve very significant funding on a scale that would challenge the resources of a major City. Funding appears to principally depend on the success of a proposed Workplace Parking Levy [WPL] initiative, broadly similar in its level to that in the City of Nottingham. However no detailed WPL proposal has been formulated or drawn up yet for Warrington. It is still wholly unclear as to the degree of geographical outreach such a scheme would have. For instance, would the WPL apply right across the Borough, including all employment areas [Gemini, Birchwood, Barley castle etc.] Would it be flat rate or contoured? How, if any, would exceptions be applied, such as for Health services, Emergency Services or other essential key workers Etc. The Council has not yet made available any details of their speculative WPL scheme and in deed it is questionable as to the level of Public and Business support that could be achieved.

**Therefore it can be considered that both the LTP4 and PSV to be UNSOUND with regards to coherent credible major solutions to Warrington’s transport challenges**.

**4. Priority Transport Infrastructure Initiatives.**

**The LTP4 identifies two initial major priority road schemes:**

**a) The Western Link.**

From examination of the Council’s Western link website it can be derived that the proposed new link road facing tremendous technical challenges in the delivery of this ambitious project i.e.

* Traffic signal and controlled junction on the A56.
* High level bridge crossing of the Manchester Ship Canal. (Potential gradient issues).
* Under crossing of the Network rail London to Glasgow line (Victorian walled viaduct).
* Under crossing of the Network rail West Coast main line viaduct.
* New River Mersey Bridge crossing.
* West/East Ditton goods/Arpley rail viaduct.
* St Helens canal bridge crossing.
* Sankey Brook bridge crossing.
* Cromwell/Sankey Way junction
* Construction of new single carriageway road from A56 to A57

Although now granted partial Government funding approval, there are real concerns that the budgeted £220M will not be sufficient to delivery such a complex and high risk civil engineering project, which undoubtedly due to the nature of the works will encounter unforeseen and likely extra cost delays. The high potential for underfunding gives doubt as to its financial viability. Furthermore the planned start on site is 2021 with anticipated completion and open to public 2024. It is therefore essential that confirmations of the total scheme costs are reaffirmed to ensure that the scheme is deliverable within its Outlined Business Case (OBC).

As LTP4 highlights this is a major priority initiative and no proposed enlargement of housing should be committed to until this scheme is delivered to avoid further traffic congestion and air pollution

 **Further observations:**

* The first major comment is that the link will beneficially remove a large amount of traffic going through the centre of Warrington. However although this proposal will relieve the A56 Chester Road swing bridge, and Chester Road / Bridge foot, the Western Link will be wholly irrelevant to traffic heading to/from the Town Centre and the North Warrington’M62 employment belt’ from the A49 corridor [to the South] and from the A50 corridor [to the South-east], and from the existing and proposed new settlements in between. In simple terms this project offers limited benefits to the majority of South Warrington residents and Businesses. This of course is based on the premise that this new Western link will remain toll free, otherwise traffic will continue to use Chester Road and Bridge Foot.
* The second comment regarding this link is its need. It is perceived the greater need is one of commercial advantage to support Port Warrington. This link would appear to be primarily concerned with servicing the needs of Port Warrington. As such, from available data provided by Peel Ports, it will be heavily used by LGV and HGV’s (over 1000 HGVs movements per day). Serving the new port and facilitating better access to the M62 and Omega site to the North and the M56 and the potential Barley Castle Logistics site to the South.
* The design of the Western Link is a single carriageway road connecting two existing dual carriageways which would seem to be illogical and badly thought through from a future prospective, bearing in mind the aspirational and unjustified employment development objectives proposed by the Council. It is interesting to note that when Council officers were challenged at the Council’s consultation event on the single carriageway design their response was that of economic and financial constraints as the determining factors. Therefore the proposal shows a gross inconsistency with other strategic infrastructure routes. To simply state that the Council has gone ahead with a scheme that ultimately may fall short due to its design on the basis of financial constraints is both unacceptable from the public purse prospective and unsound transport planning.
* The approved Centre Link will undoubtedly create increased traffic problems on the existing roads in the area i.e. Gainsborough Road. This coupled with the Western link has the potential for a perfect storm in terms of traffic congestion resulting in existing localised pinch points becoming saturated and overloaded
* The overall benefit of the Western Link to the existing highway infrastructure is highly questionable London Road [A49] and Chester Road [A56] as the vast majority of residents in South Warrington travelling north are extremely unlikely to use the Western Link to access services or employment within the Town Centre. Indeed with the proposed residential growth the current level of traffic congestion will be exasperated.

**b) Garden Suburb Southern Strategic Link (GSSSL).**

This link, described within the PSV documentation as an ‘**illustrative link’**, it is also termed as an ‘enhanced contingency’. It has been indicated as a conceptual route on PSV maps running from the A49 via the Garden Suburb to meet up with the B5356 at the proposed very large Langtree Six/56 employment area and then on to the A50.

It is interesting to note that the Six/56 development with its lack of rail access, demonstrates that the Councils policy for developing multimodal freight transport facilities in order to assist in the sustainable movement of goods is flawed and patently not being practised. If it was then a rail served site would have been put forward.

It is realistic to assume that GSSSL would attract HGV usage unless strict weight restrictions are applied. Otherwise the route will become a heavily used goods and freight road that will have an environmental impact on the area in terms of air pollution and noise.

The current route of the GSSSL will take it past Three Schools, close to existing residential homes, and takes no consideration of the consequential Air pollution, noise, and dangers that accompany a road of this nature, particularly if the new road does not carry a weight restriction and therefore allows HGV’s to access it 24/7.

As stated in the Councils ‘Infrastructure Delivery Plan 2019’ the estimated cost for this road is £93M and currently no source of funding has been identified. Yet again it is planned for the medium term despite assurances from the Council that Infrastructure developments will be in place before housing is developed.

There is no clear strategy that ensures traffic generated by the Garden Suburb will not have an adverse impact on the local community. The effects on the current highway infrastructure will be enormous i.e. A49, A56, A50, in particular Stockton Heath High Street, Stretton Village, Grappenhall Road, London Road, Lumb Brook Bridge, Wilderspool Causeway and Latchford Village, etc.

There is no evidence to support the assumption by the Council that the proposed GSSSL will reduce traffic travelling from Stockton Heath via the A49 to the M56. It is illogical to think traffic would divert onto the proposed GSSSL and then be confronted with another traffic junction beyond the Cat and Lion Junction and before junction 10 of the M56.

The aspirational vision of an enhanced contingency comprising of a part dual carriageway road being made for a futuristic mass transit system is totally without substance**.[ Refer to section 7 for further details]**

The Council have alluded to within their background documentation that the Garden Suburb will incorporate an enhanced vehicular movement network. The objective will be to use this network to improve linkages to the Town Centre, particularly through enhanced public transport networks. The primary loop being a transport corridor linking Warrington Town Centre via the A49 and A50. However much of the Garden Suburb will not be directly serviced by such a bus, unless if performs a protracted service of zig-zags. Then in trying to reach the Town Centre it will have to contend with London Road and Stockton Heath High Street Traffic congestion (no possibility of a bus lane unless substantial demolition is undertaken) or the A50 Knutsford Road and Latchford Village traffic congestion (ditto ref demolition).

There also appears to be no appreciation of the consequential traffic flows in regards to the proposed Garden Suburb Neighbourhood Centre and the anticipated increased traffic movements on both the A49 and A50

The LTP4/PSV takes little or no consequence of the fact that the existing South Warrington highway infrastructure is already at saturation point at peak periods and unless there is a massive investment in improving the existing roads and bridge crossings of all three waterways (Bridgewater, MSC and River Mersey) their plans are doomed to failure and will cause unacceptable hardship to local residents.

The proposed junction between the GSSSL and the A49 in Stretton is ill-conceived and would undoubtedly cause severe traffic congestion at Junction 10 of the M56. This matter needs a serious review with Highways England. There is a complete lack of clarity from the Council, as officers have repeatedly stated that the GSSSL is only currently illustrative and therefore the LTP4/PSV lacks credibility as significant traffic congestion issues are not being addressed, with adhoc ill-thought out solutions being proposed.

**Therefore the case for the Southern Strategic link as outlined within both the LTP4 and PSV is fundamentally lacking in substance and is UNSOUND.**

**c) Costings**

Throughout the Councils documentation there are inconsistences in particular the ‘Council’s Infrastructure Delivery Plan 2019’.

For example an allowance of £55m has been set aside for the replacement high level cantilever bridge [which is assumed to be based upon a similar weight restricted bridge], however the Western link high level crossing of the MSC, which is much more substantial and will be carrying HGV’s is only costed at £24.4m. How can a bigger and more complex bridge cost less!!

**5. Active Travel Policies**

The Active Travel Policies AT1 – AT9 appear to be a laudable set of policies to ensure the vision of a healthier Warrington resident is facilitated through walking and cycling. Even though evidence has been presented to support this shift towards this healthier view for the younger population. It however is a very optimistic view to assume that the population will adopt this view.

In addition what cognisance has been paid to the topography of South Warrington i.e. It is very hilly and the gradients on existing routes do not lend themselves to commuter cyclists.

The active travel policies do not address the obstructions presented by the three main waterways which isolate the southern area of Warrington to the Town Centre. There would appear to be no transport infrastructure identified within the Council’s ‘Infrastructure Delivery Plan 2019’ to facilitate ease of walking or cycling into the centre of Warrington other than the existing network.

The LTP4 also states that ‘there will be a local cycling and walking Infrastructure Plan’, and ‘The enhanced Green Space and Waterways network…. Will provide high quality walking and cycling routes’. However, such cycling and walking networks need to be both comprehensive and continuous, as there is only limited value in providing isolated lengths of walkway/cycleway that end at complex multi-lane junctions or large roundabouts. Indeed the LPT4 admits that the present Town Centre is ‘Impenetrable’ for cyclists. These comprehensive networks also need to be in place in advance of demand, not slowly developed piecemeal. The total cost will be significant, and will involve giving priority to ‘ Green ‘ transport modes at key junctions, the very reverse of Warrington’s present situation. There will consequentially be an adverse effect upon motorised general highway traffic, which has not been factored into the Council’s transport modelling, as clearly schemes have not yet been designed. Therefore there seems extremely little likelihood of comprehensive walking and cycling networks being planned, funded and constructed as to be fully in place by the time the proposed settlements are constructed in South Warrington

**Therefore this set of policies as a whole is lacking and therefore UNSOUND as an overall objective.**

**6. Smarter Travel Choices Policies**

The Smarter Travel Policies ST1 – ST11 are once again laudable policies but they are largely supportive of the Active Travel policies. All these ST policies rely on a social shift, which is a very optimistic view especially for the older population.

Social change has to be targeted at the full age range of the population. These policies do not address the older generation and their needs. ST7, regarding bus travel and improvements specifically needs to address this. However, these policies are minor with respect to the bigger picture of the problems facing Warrington’s congestion and air pollution problems. The vast majority of ST policies are to continue or support existing initiatives and to investigate a very small number of newly defined and sufficiently detailed that really give people any valid options. Bike sharing (ST3) from the South of the Borough will not happen due to the difficulty of getting over the waterways safely.

**The town centre car club (also ST3) is an aspirational pipedream and will realistically not happen.**

**7. Passenger Transport Policies**

Passenger transport policies PT1 – PT19 are targeted at two main areas, bus and rail initiatives. Both are vital to the smooth running of an effective transport system throughout Warrington and with the wider country. These policies seem to have a sensible outlook. However, once again, given the waterway barriers separating North and South Warrington there are no plans to address or improve local connectivity to effectively support PT policies or solutions. There are no rail links in South Warrington so that is a none starter. There are no proposed improvements defined in the Councils ‘Infrastructure Delivery Plan 2019’ to invest in improving the many small crossings of the Bridgewater Canal, nor the MSC or River Mersey. The only major construction planned to connect north to south is the Western Link which in no way serves the PT policies.

The introduction of Mass Transit System such as a Light Rapid Transit[Tramway]or guided bus system can be attractive in reducing car usage and air pollution, however before such a system could be considered as a potential solution to Warrington’s future public transport needs it would need to undertake a rigorous examination.

This would require carrying out a major feasibility exercise to look at issues such as detailed Route and Station planning, connectivity, integration with existing public transport operations and facilities, land availability, Legal processes, passenger demand forecasting, funding sources, full cost benefit analysis, park and ride opportunities and the potential impact on existing property owners. A fundamental issue to be considered is the impact of the introduction of such a system on the existing road network and waterway crossings in terms of construction and future operation.

The LTP4 states both that ‘we [WBC] will identify options, and that the concept of developing a Mass Transit system…..is at a very early stage’, both of which suggest no detailed thinking has yet occurred , let alone the employing of specialist consultants . Yet LTP4 also inexplicably states ‘Early work confirms that a Mass Transit System could be commercially viable’. These contradictory statements suggest that the idea of a Mass Transit System has only been added into the LPT4 at a very late stage, and that little serious work has yet been carried out. It is seemingly being put forward [ High profile], as if it will become a reality within a few years , when in reality there are likely to be far more detailed proposals already in existence elsewhere in other local Authorities who are well ahead in the queue for scarce Government funds

None of the above appears to have been carried out so far by the Council therefore it can reasonably be assumed that the inclusion of a Mass Transit System in the LPT4 is no more than a wish and should in no circumstances been seen as an answer to the overall road traffic and transportation issues identified within the PSV Local Plan and faced by South Warrington

The LTP4 also envisages increasing local public transport use by three times during the Local plan period. However, bus use has fallen by almost 50% in a decade partly due to;

\*High car ownership

\*Town Centre retail decline

\*Unreliable Bus services

\*traffic congestion and lack of certainty and reliability

\*Withdrawals of services

\*Relatively high fares

Even one of the above factors will prove very challenging to reverse, let alone all six in combination. In addition the LTP4 does not expand on where the funding will come from to provide the necessary increase in buses required and the consequential effect on the Town Centre bus terminal etc. The laudable aspiration to treble bus usage may therefore be largely or even wholly unrealistic and unattainable

**Therefore, as a set of policies it provides little benefit to South Warrington and is considered as an UNSOUND plan.**

**8. Safer Travel Policies**

Safer travel policies RS1 – RS18 do not appear to provide any new concepts that those already generally used throughout the Borough. As an ongoing set of policies they need to be effectively implemented. They complement and repeat many policies covered by other sections of LPT4.

**9. Cleaner Fuel Policies**

Cleaner Fuel Policies CF1 – CF4 are woefully inadequate taken into consideration that CF2 and CF3 commission studies into alternative fuel within the 0-5 year period. These are priority issues affecting Warrington’s poor air quality record and should in fact be addressed urgently.

EV charging points (CF4) on all new housing developments is a planning issue and should be initiated immediately and not within 5 years. This is a Developer reserve matters requirement and it does not need a 5 year review to implement a sensible and environmental option for new homes.

**10. Asset Management Policies**

It is noted from comments in the Councils ‘Infrastructure Delivery Plan 2019’ *that current LTP budget allocations are insufficient to prevent ongoing network deterioration’.* With this acceptance by the Council it is deemed that the Asset Management policies which look after all network roadways and structures within the Borough will not achieve their objectives and will continue to deteriorate with the Council eventually being faced with extremely high repair or replacement costs during the Local Plan period and not least Public exposure to Health & Safety issues.

**This is an UNSOUND and unpalatable plan.**

**11. Network Management Policies**

This set of policies NM1 – NM13 are a set of normally expected requirements to keep the network in a viable and workable condition, with new measures targeted to be introduced to improve network operation. However, NM11 is the Achilles heel in the whole roadway system serving South Warrington. Peel Ports has ownership of all the swing bridges and the Cantilever Bridge within the Warrington network system. Peel Ports also has full control over the operation and maintenance of these bridges. Although WBC continues to work with Peel to maintain traffic flow, Peel has the right to operate the swing bridges at any time to facilitate vessel movements. Operationally this is going to become a major problem with the proposed increase in vessel movements to facilitate Peel Ports investment in the new various port facilities and thus leading to circa a 10 fold increase in container movement via the MSC. This will potentially have a detrimental impact on traffic to and from the South of Warrington and will potentially grid lock traffic to and from South Warrington. Even the Western Link, if and when it is eventually built, will not solve this problem.

Furthermore, the possibility of the conceptual high level cantilever bridge replacement is only planned for the medium term which will present major planning problems. In addition the PSV indicates safeguarding land adjacent to the existing weight restricted Cantilever high level bridge. An unanswered serious question is what will the replacement Bridge carry i.e. HGV’s or light traffic? Also there has been no regard given to necessary highway infrastructure [whether it is for HGV or Light traffic]. This is a major omission and is raising Public concern.

The three swing bridges were designed and constructed over 125 years ago when the MSC was opened in 1894. The bridges originally served a far lighter load than those being imposed today. It must be assumed that they are well past their design and operational life span and it is doubtful, due to wear and tear, whether they will contend with the proposed increase in Vessel and Traffic movements without having to undergo major refurbishment or total replacement. It must also be noted that the LTP4 makes no reference to replacing or undertaking a major review of the 19th century swing bridges therefore how viable is a Transport Plan that fails to address the Council’s reliance on a Victorian infrastructure that is controlled entirely by a Third Party

**This Network Management policy is UNSOUND when applied to keeping traffic flowing to and from South Warrington.**

**12. Freight Management Policies**

This set of policies, FC1 – FM16 give the greatest cause for concern within LPT4. The future increase in LGV and HGV traffic movements within the Warrington Network will dramatically increase, despite data disclosed in the document. With the proposed Port Warrington adding over a thousand additional HGV vehicle movements daily north to the M62 and south to the M56. This coupled with the proposed Six/56 Logistics Development and Stobart’s potential development; both will flood South Warrington with LGV and HGV’s. This will have a severe impact on the local roadway infrastructure and it will introduce increased levels of vehicle emission pollution and noise, and not to forget the additional traffic congestion.

The case made for containerised freight shipping movements and intermodal facilities reducing road freight movements is subjective. Once containers are offloaded at Port Warrington HGV’s will be required, via the Warrington Highway system, to deliver them to their final destination.

There appears to be no coherent strategy for managing any adverse effects from increased HGV movements, including those that would result from the establishment of the following;

\*Stobart’s National Distribution Centre

\*Six/56 Development

\*Port Warrington Development

\*Warrington Business Park Developments

It is accepted that Port Warrington will be serviced by the MSC and by rail [West Coast Main Line], there is no rail or water access for either of the proposed major logistic centres [ Stobart’s and Six/56], which will inevitably focus freight movement exclusively upon road vehicles [ vans and HGV’s]. Also, in contrast to proposals for cars, there are no proposals to phase out diesel propulsion for lorries. The Six/56 and Stobart’s developments contradicts the Council’s and Government policies to support rail freight and increased sustainable use of the existing MSC, in preference to the undesirable alternative of road haulage to inland destinations from the Port of Liverpool.

Warrington will become a town surrounded by an HGV commuter belt, which will ultimately strangulate Warrington and further increase the current unacceptable air pollutants that have an adverse effect on resident’s health and wellbeing

**The Freight Management policies are deemed to be UNSOUND**

**Conclusion**

In summary, LPT4/PSV Local Plan do not make adequate provision for transport between the proposed new housing estates of South Warrington and Warrington town centre. The most likely result would seem to be that the development takes on the status of a dormitory town; the precise opposite of the Council’s stated objective. The proposals of LPT4 are at best speculative with little substance and limited detail to support them.

Its current soundness and deliverability exposes the very foundation of the PSV Local Plan and ultimately fails to serve the residents of Warrington, specifically those residing in South Warrington.

**APPENDIX 1 provides an in depth detailed commentary on the failure of the LPT4/PSV Local Plan to effectively address Warrington’s transport issues, in particular South Warrington.**