

Response to North Warwickshire Borough Council's Draft Local Plan

From North Warwickshire Labour Group

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This is a response submitted by North Warwickshire Borough Council Labour Group to the Borough Council's draft local plan. The Labour Group supports plan led development and is proud to have been in administration back in 2014 when North Warwickshire Borough Council became the first authority in this sub-region to have an adopted Core Strategy.

That Core Strategy set out a housing requirement of 3150 new dwellings in the period 2011 – 2029. This equates to 175 dwellings per year and is considered by many to be the natural growth of a rural borough the size of North Warwickshire. During the process of the 2014 Core Strategy development, the then Labour Council was disappointed to have to follow Conservative Government rules that forced co-operation on housing numbers between neighboring authorities. That is to say, when one area cannot accommodate their housing need, nearby Council's must look to take the overspill.

In order to protect the future of North Warwickshire and to ensure an adopted local plan, we reluctantly included 500 dwellings from Tamworth's housing need but made clear that these homes would not encroach on the meaningful gap and would be dispersed around North Warwickshire. Tamworth were left in no doubt that there would be no extension of Tamworth in North Warwickshire, including developments directly adjacent to their settlement.

The new Draft Local Plan includes taking a significant number (over 3000) of homes from Birmingham's housing need. This is a significant number and when added with new apparent evidence suggesting a greater need locally, the new Draft Local Plan will be designed to deliver at least 9070 properties in North Warwickshire up to 2031.

Labour in North Warwickshire will be opposing this 'Draft Local Plan' and we wish to formally object to it on the following grounds:

1. *It is unclear how the evidenced need in North Warwickshire increased in the 2015 SHLAA. It is not acceptable for the Council to simply say 'it has increased'. Further information and evidence is required.*
2. *The number of new homes being taken from Birmingham's projected shortfall is significant. It adds another third to the number of homes to be built and it can therefore not be reasonable to accept this volume of dwellings.*
3. *Notwithstanding our concern about numbers, we also object to the 'Draft Site Allocations Plan' on the grounds that a settlement hierarchy is the wrong allocation method for this number of properties.*
4. *The Council has provided no evidence that this number of new homes is deliverable in terms of infrastructure and planning processes.*
5. *If this new plan is not deliverable, it will never achieve a 5-year land supply and therefore only serves to the detriment of our Borough as it pushes up the figure we need to achieve and means we will always be further away from achieving it.*

Therefore, we believe the Council is using a housing figure (9070) that has not been justified, a strategy for allocation that is not suitable and is doing this without a clear

plan for delivery. The Council has also failed to show it effectively evaluated other options before making a decision on the route to take.

The Council made the decision to follow the previous settlement hierarchy model to allocate sites for new homes. The larger the current settlement, the more new homes will be built there. This was suitable for a smaller number of new homes (as in the 2014 Core Strategy) but we do not agree this is suitable for the new figure of 9070.

The evidence is unclear as to how North Warwickshire reached the figure of 9070. It is not evidenced both in terms of democratic decision making and planning process.

In order to deliver this 158% increase in annual housing completions, required to meet this plan, the Council has made the following changes to its housing strategy, planning processes etc.:

1. NONE

This means, the Council plans to deliver 158% more homes per year from now onwards but has not provided a clear plan for how this will happen. On the ground, it plans to build homes around existing towns and villages in the north of the Borough without

really providing a clear indication or actual plan for the infrastructure needed or the infrastructure wanted by the local community. It also fails to provide any detail on plans for 'creating' communities and simply focuses on the very basics, and it even sometimes fails on that.

The Labour Group do not support allocating the majority of new homes to existing towns and villages. If the numbers change by (+158%) then so should then way you deliver a better North Warwickshire.

The Council made a decision to follow the settlement hierarchy without seeing the outcome of the sustainability report. It therefore made the decision without having all information in front of decision makers.

Despite making the decision to follow a settlement hierarchy without evidence like the sustainability assessment, infrastructure plans and detail were poor. The Council had not and still has not thought through the needs and wants of existing and future members of the communities that make up North Warwickshire.

The Council has failed to show its plan (however basic it is) can be delivered or that it will remove the harm caused by developments. The Council has certainly failed to show any betterment from its Draft Local Plan for any community in North Warwickshire.

The Labour Group do not believe that building on every single bit of green space in and around our existing towns and villages is the appropriate way to take forward development policy in North Warwickshire.

Quality of life is vital and given our rural nature, we should seek to protect 'rurality' in settlements as something we can offer to people living and working here. Once we remove green spaces. The Council should therefore be considering other strategies for allocating housing numbers, namely a new town or village.

It is not yet clear how passing this plan and its increased housing numbers in terms of a 5-year housing supply, can actually ever be achieved. The Council has a planning system that shows no signs of passing this number of new homes and has a track record of taking many years to approve large sites.

North Warwickshire Labour Group and its 14 Councillors therefore object to all documents that form part of this consultation.