

Places Directorate: Economy, Waste and Infrastructure

Gillian Bishop, Corporate Director / Acting Deputy Chief Executive



Mr. E. Thwaite
15 Springmount
Lowton
Warrington
WA3 2QH

Our reference: MW/NS/
Your reference:
Please ask for: Mike Worden
Extension: 4357
Direct line: 01942 404357
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Dear Mr. Thwaite

Wigan Core Strategy – East Lancs Road Corridor

Thank you for your letter of 5 May 2011 seeking a response to your earlier letter to the Council. We logged that letter as a representation on the Core Strategy and have only recently managed to summarise and record all of the representations made during the consultation exercise.

I have answered the questions set out in the letter in the order in which they have been raised, but have combined some of the answers to avoid duplication.

What is the reason for the development of the land in question?

Quite simply the borough needs to find land on which to build houses to meet future housing needs. The Core Strategy has to identify in broad terms how that need will be met. We know that this need equates to around 1000 new homes per year in the borough. This was the target set for the borough in the Regional Spatial Strategy following demographic assessments and the Council has decided to retain this target after looking at population and household forecasts for the period up to 2026. New homes will be needed because a high level of new households will form from the existing population. People are living longer, more people are living in smaller households and we need to ensure that sufficient land is identified, to meet this need. If we don't do this, we are likely in the future to have housing shortages in the borough.

The Core Strategy sets down general principles as to where new housing growth will be directed. Around 85% of new housing will be steered to sites in the central spine of the borough, from Wigan through Hindley and through to Atherton and Leigh, but a small proportion will be met in the outer areas which includes the East Lancs Road Corridor. The

Please reply to Mike Worden

Wigan Council, Places Directorate: Economy, Waste and Infrastructure, Economy Division, Civic Buildings, New Market Street, Wigan WN1 1RP.

Phone: 01942 404357 Fax: 01942 404228

E-mail: m.worden@wigan.gov.uk

www.wigan.gov.uk

Corridor has been identified as an area in which future housing could take place, but a further consultation and examination exercise will determine which of the four potential sites should be identified. The Core Strategy simply deals with the principle without being site specific.

Are the houses needed or is it that the Council needs the money?

The answer to the first question explains the issue relating to need. The Council does not own any of the potential sites in the East Lancs Road Corridor and so will not gain directly from their development. The Council intends to bring forward a new Community Infrastructure Levy from 2013 and so will be able to collect some funding from all new house completions in the borough to help support the provision of new community infrastructure (which could be roads, community facilities, new open space etc), across the borough. This process will be subject to consultation and independent scrutiny. We will have to look at what community infrastructure will be needed in Lowton East.

How many new builds are still empty in Golborne and Lowton?

The borough has one of the lowest housing vacancy rates in Greater Manchester at 15%. New builds that are empty though are very few as currently house builders will only build if sure of a sale given financial conditions. The difficulty for new home buyers is obtaining new mortgage finance, but we are planning to 2026 and have to see past the current market difficulties. You are right about flats, it is unlikely that new house building in the future will involve as many flats as was the case in the last decade.

Who needs these houses from within the existing area or are you creating executive houses and hoping that they will attract people from out of the area?

We don't know the answer to this question as we don't know which of the potential sites will be identified and the scale of the release. However, it is likely that 25% of the new houses will be affordable housing in line with the Council's proposed policy and therefore more likely to be accessible for local people looking for housing. It is true that given the location, new housing along the corridor will also be attractive to commuters, as is the case with the existing housing. Some of the potential sites would involve a loss of farmland although none are good quality agricultural land (Grades 1, 2 and 3a)

We require detailed information on how you intend to improve transport infrastructure and sewerage.

We cannot provide this information as this is detailed planning that will not be undertaken until the principle of further development in the corridor is established through the Core Strategy. However, we are content at this stage that there are no transport or sewerage barriers to bringing forward any of the four potential sites, but there will need to be investment in new infrastructure to serve the sites.

Why use good farming land when there is unused brownfield land all over the borough?

The Core Strategy proposes that over 75% of new housing will be built on brownfield land but we will need to use some greenfield land to make up the rest. We have to provide a balance across the borough in terms of location and type of site. Most Councils will be looking to achieve high brownfield land build rates but most, like us, will also have to rely upon an element of greenfield land. Most brownfield land is in the centre of the borough and in Wigan and Leigh, not in Golborne, Lowton and Astley.

Has anyone other than builders found the proposals attractive?

We believe that potential limited development in the East Lancs Road corridor will be attractive to builders but also to the local communities who will need more housing.

How many people objected?

At this last stage of consultation (February / March 2011) 24 individual responses were received in relation to the East Lancs Road Corridor proposal. There is no process currently in planning legislation for this proposal to be put to a public referendum. The proposal, along with all those in the Core Strategy, will be subject to independent examination by a Planning Inspector and all the representations made will be considered. Those people who have made representations will have the right to appear at the examination, which is likely to take place this Autumn.

We will ensure that all those who have made representations are kept informed of the process going forward. The Core Strategy will be considered by the Council's Cabinet on 7 July and then by Council on 20 July 2011 before being submitted to Government for examination.

I hope the above information is helpful and answers your questions.

Yours sincerely



Mike Worden
Head of Planning and Transport