

Local Plan Public Inquiry

Introduction

My name is Paul Hooton, [REDACTED]. I'm a recently elected Green Party Councillor for Haydock Ward at St Helens Borough Council.

Employment

Last mile distribution employment density is typically 1 job per 70m², the following is a quote made at a recent planning hearing by the developer (FFN – Plot 2EA).

“As a minimum 2,500 jobs will be created and depending on the specific uses it could be more than double that amount” (Mr. Keith Wilson - Bericote). From recent experience at Florida Farm it can be in the region of 1 job per 350 – 400m².

Although described as an opportunity of a lifetime, only a hand full of Haydock residents are employed at the site. 10% of promised jobs and mostly unsustainable due to automation, due to COVID & changing retail habits new B8 warehousing developments are more likely to be taken up by similar sortation centres. These types of development should be regarded as unsustainable. Initially only yielding low quantities of jobs, due to automation each generation will be offered fewer and fewer of jobs.

How can we test or validate these figures, what type of scrutiny is applied, how can we be sure that these low job yields will happen again?

Should St Helens Local plan not be encouraging STEM industries & green technology such as solar power and wind power. St Helens has a highly skilled work force, stand at Windle Island or Haydock Island any morning and you will see them driving into West Lancashire, Liverpool & Manchester. By facilitating this type of industry, we can reduce the carbon footprint of the borough by reducing car use (commuting out of the borough) and be a driving force in tackling climate change by promoting the types of industry that will make this happen.

Housing

The current local plan is set to encourage people from outside the borough to come and live in St Helens. As the current local plan hinges on B8 warehousing that may only produce 10% of the predicted job yields, should the predicted population influx due to jobs creation not be adjusted to reflect these lower numbers. 30% of new builds on greenfield sites will be affordable housing, how many of the remaining 70% will be bought by people new to the borough? Persons newly moved into the borough would need a salary in the region of £70,000 to afford the remaining 3 to 4 bedroom houses. They would undoubtedly need to travel outside the borough to work, thus increasing car use and not addressing climate change.

St Helens has a legacy of industry including mining, glass and chemicals. Since the brownfield register was compiled, how many pieces of contaminated land have been added to the register, how many of these plots have been investigated. These may be remediated very easily, but the pace is slow, and no real determination has been shown. No green belt land should be released until all contaminated brown field sites are investigated.

Environmental losses

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The greenbelt surrounding Haydock is a haven for wildlife, supporting species of red listed bird, mammal's such as hedgehog and roe deer, amphibians, and a myriad of invertebrates. Local people exercise here filling their lungs with fresh air. During the dark days of lockdown these places may even help preserve their fragile mental health. The villages and towns that surround Haydock are currently separated by greenbelt. Considering the recent announcement of a climate emergency, the local plan will rely heavily on this green belt's destruction. If all the planned developments are allowed to go ahead, the local area will change from semi-rural to an unbroken conurbation of houses and factories. Stretching from the farmland north of the A580 near Garswood, through Haydock on to Newton, via the fields at Vista Road and on through Parkside to Warrington. The wildlife, much of which is already in serious decline, will simply disappear. Considering the sheer scale of these multiple developments, it can only be described as a disaster for wildlife and a great loss to future generations.

With regards to mitigation due to green belt development, there seems to be little or no focus on Biodiversity in St Helens, other than box ticking. The policy of developers giving donations to Mersey forest to plant trees in compensation for loss of diverse habitats will be catastrophic for wildlife in St Helens and will result in the decline of many species we currently have. In the case of *Viscum album* (mistletoe FFS – Plot 2HA), this may become a localized extinction event, as this is the only place in the borough that it grows. There is no prospect of St Helens achieving biodiversity net gain without a strategy and targets / objectives in species and habitats. It's not enough this is left to Merseyside environment advisory service; they are too generic and cover the entire LCR region. St Helens council needs to take its own responsibility. The Parkside inquiry had ecologists parachuted in from outside the area, with limited time and scope, with no knowledge of the challenges this region faces in terms of its ecology. Their output was a suggestion to randomly plant trees and a Defra metric which had no supporting evidence. The local plan seems to be corralling nature into defined areas such as Sankey valley and bold forest park and destroying habitats elsewhere on an epic and uncontrolled scale. Both Sankey Valley and Bold Forest Park / Lyme and wood all have extensive human disturbance along with anti-social behavior. They have wildlife but are nature reserves in the sense of wild countryside. This if left to continue will result in substantial decline in range and scale of species in St Helens going forward. Any developer will be allowed to develop and claim biodiversity net gain simply by offering to plant trees in one of the chosen areas, whether there is any reason for it or not. With no measures, metrics or objectives, the disastrous approach used for Parkside west is being rolled out across the borough.