



Proposed Input from Birchwood Town Council to the Warrington Local Plan Update

1. Protecting Birchwood's Original Planned New Town Character

Birchwood was deliberately designed as a balanced, mixed-use community combining high-tech employment, residential neighbourhoods, and extensive green infrastructure. The Local Plan recognises the importance of quality of place, green infrastructure, and sustainable travel as strategic objectives (Local Plan Sections 3 and 8)

Birchwood Town Council would like to:

- Request that the updated Local Plan reaffirm Birchwood's identity as a high-tech employment hub, resisting the unchecked conversion of offices to warehousing.
- Ask for a specific policy statement recognising Birchwood's New Town origins and the importance of maintaining a diverse employment base, not dominated by logistics.
- Propose a Birchwood-specific design and employment character SPD (Supplementary Planning Document) to guide future redevelopment.

2. Managing Office-to-Warehouse Conversions

The adopted Local Plan emphasises economic growth, quality of place, and environmental and amenity protection (Policies W1, W4, W5, and Section 8) However, it does not explicitly address the cumulative impact of office-to-warehouse conversions in Birchwood.

Birchwood Town Council has concerns that:

- Warehousing generates heavier vehicle movements, conflicting with the Local Plan's sustainable travel objectives (Objective W4)
- Loss of office space undermines the borough's ability to meet its high-value employment targets (Economic Growth policies, Section 4)
- Warehousing often results in large, blank-fronted buildings that erode the planned landscape character.

We therefore request that the following are taken into account:

- Introduce a policy test requiring applicants to demonstrate:
 - Why existing office space cannot be refurbished or repurposed for high-tech or knowledge-based uses.
 - The traffic and environmental impacts of warehouse conversions, including HGV routing and air quality.
 - How proposals maintain or enhance Birchwood's employment mix.
- Require **cumulative** impact assessments for logistics development in Birchwood, not just site-by-site analysis.

3. Traffic and Transport Impacts

The Local Plan's transport objectives (Objective W4) emphasise sustainable travel, reduced congestion, and integration with residential areas.

Issues which we believe are an issue:

- Warehousing increases HGV traffic on Birchwood Way, Birchwood Park Avenue, Daten Avenue and surrounding distributor roads.
- Increased logistics activity conflicts with the New Town's pedestrian- and cycle-friendly layout.
- Traffic impacts risk undermining the Local Plan's commitments to active travel and air quality improvements.

We would like to see the following aspects included:

- Request a Birchwood Transport and Movement Study as part of the Local Plan evidence base.
- Ask for a policy requirement that any logistics development must:
 - Demonstrate safe HGV routing that avoids residential areas.
 - Contribute to active travel improvements through S106 payments.
 - Fund junction upgrades where cumulative impacts are identified.

4. Green Infrastructure and Open Space Maintenance

The Local Plan includes strong commitments to green infrastructure, biodiversity, and open space quality (Sections 8.3–8.6). Birchwood's green spaces are central to its identity but have suffered for a number of years from under-maintenance.

Current issues:

- Many green corridors, woodland belts, and amenity spaces are in **declining condition** due to lack of routine maintenance. This includes Locking Stumps Common and the Walled Garden at Oakwood Gate. Poorly maintained green spaces undermine:
 - Biodiversity objectives.
 - Active travel routes.
 - Community wellbeing.
 - The New Town landscape character.

We would like to see the following policy additions:

- A Birchwood Green Infrastructure Renewal Programme, funded through:
 - Developer contributions (Section 106 / possible future Infrastructure Levy).
 - Council capital programmes.
- A requirement that development proposals in Birchwood:
 - Contribute to the restoration and long-term management of adjacent green spaces.
 - Enhance biodiversity in line with the Local Plan's biodiversity net gain requirements.

- Recognition of Birchwood’s strategic green corridors as assets requiring priority investment.

5. Safeguarding Employment Land for High-Value Sectors

The Local Plan’s economic growth policies (Section 4) aim to support high-value employment, including science, technology, and professional services. We believe that it is very important to continue this focus especially with potential growth in employment in the nuclear and renewables/energy storage sectors.

We would request that:

- The updated plan protect key employment areas in Birchwood (e.g., Birchwood Park) from conversion to low-value logistics.
- A policy designation for “High-Tech Employment Priority Areas” is established where:
 - Logistics uses are restricted.
 - Office refurbishment and modernisation are encouraged.
 - Digital infrastructure investment is prioritised.

6. Monitoring and Review

The Local Plan includes a monitoring framework (Section 11)

We would like to request that the monitoring framework include Birchwood-specific indicators, such as:

- Ratio of office to warehouse floorspace.
- Condition of green infrastructure assets.
- Traffic volumes on key distributor roads.
- Employment mix by sector.

This would ensure early identification of negative trends.

Summary:

Birchwood Town Council recommends that the updated Local Plan:

1. Reaffirms Birchwood’s New Town identity as a balanced, high-tech, mixed-use community.
2. Introduces stronger controls on office-to-warehouse conversions.
3. Requires cumulative traffic impact assessments and improved HGV routing policies.
4. Invests in green infrastructure renewal and mandates developer contributions.
5. Protects high-value employment land and discourages logistics dominance.
6. Implements Birchwood-specific monitoring indicators to track change over time.

These recommendations align with the adopted Local Plan’s strategic objectives and help ensure Birchwood remains a sustainable, attractive, and economically diverse community.