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Towcester Town Council Response to the West Northamptonshire Local Plan – 2043 (Regulation 19) Pre-Submission Document – October 2026

Introduction

The Draft Local Plan notes that: *"Towcester has experienced significant recent housing growth and today has a population of around 11,500 people (census 2021), which represents population growth of nearly 30% over 20 years."* This is of course an underestimation of growth as the population of Towcester is now over 13,000 but nevertheless Towcester has indeed seen a rapid expansion over recent times. As the Draft Local Plan highlights, Towcester already has a significant additional pipeline of housing commitments, including windfall opportunities that may arise within the settlement confines.

Towcester Town Council believes the proposed additional allocation of housing would be detrimental to the town's ability to absorb the additional population in a sustainable way. A period of consolidation is needed to enable a greater sense of community for residents, so everyone can feel a sense of belonging within the town. Further continued rapid expansion would only further create a predominately dormitory town, without a sense of community, just a series of unconnected large housing estates, with residents reliant on the car.

Over the past decade and more, both the Town Council and its residents have with some reluctance, accepted a high level of growth and have been prepared to take perhaps more than its fair share of such growth. However, facilities in terms of health provision, and secondary education haven't been commensurate with the growth in housing. Part of the reason for this shortfall is the considerable proportion of S106 funding that was allocated to providing an A43/A5 link road; despite this being needed in any event, by the developer, to gain access to the Towcester SUE. A failure by the planning authority to act on legally binding agreements, regarding the implementation of the S106, led to long delays in community facilities being provided, and in the opening of the A43/A5 link road. It was the offer of a link road to bypass the town centre, that persuaded residents to support the Towcester SUE. Hence the frustration at the years of delay in opening the road. Towcester Town Council and its residents are understandably sceptical of the planning process and this new Draft Local Plan.

Policy T1: Spatial Strategy for Towcester (Rural Service Centre);
Policy T2: Towcester, connectivity and travel; and
Policy T3: Towcester, North of Burcote Road

Summary of Comments

Any significant site allocation for housing should clearly demonstrate its ability to be sustainable and comply with national and local policies. Towcester Town Council believes that the proposal for developing the North of Burcote Road site is flawed because it fails in this regard and should therefore be rejected as viable.

The site is separated from the Towcester SUE and other parts of the town including the town centre by the new A43/A5 link road (with a 40mph speed limit), which is a major physical and psychological barrier, intended to carry heavy traffic and designed for potential future expansion. This separation raises concerns about the ability of the site to integrate with the rest of Towcester, especially regarding access to facilities, including health services, and both primary and secondary school provision. In terms of connectivity, the site is unsuitable for facilitating walking and cycling and relies on a dependency to travel by car. It isn't compatible to Towcester's Local Cycling and Walking Implementation Plan (LCWIP). Overall, it doesn't comply with the West Northamptonshire Local Transport Plan, an overarching framework running from 2025 to 2045 that prioritizes vulnerable road users and active travel choices over cars.

Towcester Town Council questions the environmental sustainability of the site, given it conflicts with West Northamptonshire Local Plan (WNLP) objectives and its Policy T2 and Policy TR1. It also highlights issues with the link road's capacity, given that transport modelling and previous local transport strategies, which suggest the link road may reach full capacity once the Towcester SUE is fully constructed. The Town Council suggests that walking and cycling access would be severely restricted without controlled crossings, bridges or underpasses, which would be costly and impractical. Developing a major site so disconnected from essential services is fundamentally in conflict with planning policy as it contradicts local policies promoting healthier, less car-reliant lifestyles. National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) principles, such as prioritising walking and cycling, designing attractive and accessible layouts, focusing development on sustainable locations, and adopting a vision-led approach, are cited as crucial considerations that the draft Local Plan does not adequately address in relation to this site in Towcester.

The site would not reduce traffic congestion but would increase the need to travel by private car and would not minimise West Northamptonshire Council's contribution to climate change.

Archaeology is likely to be a major consideration in respect of the T3 site.

Overall and with its other major concerns, the Town Council believes the proposed additional allocation of housing would be detrimental to the town's ability to absorb such additional population growth in a sustainable way.

Detailed Comments on proposals

The Draft Plan gives a brief description of the North of Burcote Road site, in terms of its topography and its boundary with both the A43, and with the Shacks Barn Farm employment site but fails to mention its relationship with the A43/A5 link road.

Given the North of Burcote Road site is separated by the A43/A5 link road. The key issue for developing the proposed North of Burcote Road site is if integration can be achieved with the Towcester SUE, the town centre and other parts of Towcester. The A5/A43 link road forms a significant physical barrier that has a 40mph speed limit and is intended to be in effect, a bypass, that will relieve the town centre of heavy traffic, in particular HGVs. It has also been designed with sufficient space left to enable the road to be duelled to accommodate future growth in traffic.

How can an environmentally sustainable site be developed given the number of conflicts with so many WNLP objectives? Specifically, given the barrier created by the new A5/A43 link road, how can access to facilities by pedestrians and cyclists be achieved? The North of Burcote Road site would conflict with local and national planning policies that seek to reduce the dependence on cars.

There is also the issue relating to the link road's capacity and its ability to support an additional 1,400 homes. Modelling by National Highways has demonstrated that the road would be at full capacity by the time the Towcester SUE is completed. This assessment didn't take account the additional houses given planning consent over and above the original 2,750. The Towcester Town Transport Strategy, *Fit for Purpose*, published in 2013 stated:

"The forecast traffic flows along the A5, south of Towcester with development of Towcester Vale to maximum 3,300 dwellings mean the road is close to the maximum capacity of a single carriageway road. The impact on the A5 will need to be monitored as the more details of the developments emerge."

Whilst a Masterplan would be required to be agreed by West Northamptonshire Council before any development was approved, there are several fundamental issues that the draft local plan does not address, in particular the impact on the A43/A5 link road. Towcester Town Council believes this issue must be addressed at the Local Plan stage. Neglecting to address key issues at this stage resulted in the costly and ultimately failed legal action, that was taken by West Northamptonshire Council, following residents' strong objections to the previous Local Plan.

The North of Burcote Road site, separated as it is by the link road, would clearly lead to an over reliance on travel by car. Walking and cycling would be severely restricted unless numerous controlled pedestrian crossing were incorporated. Elevated pedestrian crossings might be an alternative however, several would be required, and these would be costly, visually highly intrusive, and would disadvantage those with restricted mobility. Equally unsatisfactorily would be underpasses, that would create a significant safety risk to pedestrians and cyclists. WNC's Sustainability Report states at 6.5.2: *"The factors that influence the creation of safe communities will largely be dependent upon the design of individual developments."* Underpasses would not meet the stated requirement to *"produce high-quality safe public spaces..."*

Towcester Town Council doesn't believe it's desirable to develop a major new site separated from essential services and community facilities by a road linking the A5 and A43 trunk roads and directly bordered by an often-congested A43.

The inaccessibility of the North of Burcote Road site, in terms of walking and / or cycling to health services, schools and other parts the town, including the town centre are in direct conflict with WNC's policies. Those policies related to transport, walking and cycling, and the change to healthier lifestyles, not reliant on the use of the private car.

WNC's Sustainability Report prepared for the Draft Local Plan, dated January 2026, highlights at 6.6.2: *"fewer healthcare facilities (within the plan) and ... site allocations... would not be within walking distance of these (existing) facilities. This is the case in ...Towcester."*

The draft plan in relation to Towcester does not address the issue of educational provision. Indeed, commentary on the North of Burcote Road site in the draft plan does not mention whether there will be sufficient school places available to accommodate the needs of an additional 1,400 homes. Whilst demand for primary schools has perhaps reduced in recent years, as this site will be expected (according to WNC's Three Dragons planning consultants) to deliver 40% affordable homes, it might be assumed that a high number of families with children will occupy the proposed new development than has been the case on Towcester Vale. Would existing Primary School's be able to accommodate an increase? Even if they could, it would still require children to cross the very busy A43/A5 link road.

Sponne School, Towcester's only secondary school, is already at near capacity, with many more homes on the Towcester SUE yet to be built. Towcester Town Council believes that secondary school provision should be considered as a priority at the Draft Local Plan stage in relation to the proposals for the North of Burcote Road site.

The Draft Local Plan recognises that some infrastructure is demonstrably not suited to on-site provision but doesn't state what infrastructure. The town council assumes this includes health services. Again, this demonstrates the inaccessibility of the proposed site. Health services at Silverstone, and Greens Norton would be more accessible than that in Towcester. Whether such locations have the capacity is very much in doubt but in any event, such an arrangement conflicts with Towcester being a rural service centre. Access from the proposed site to all current health centres would mean residents being dependant on travelling by car. Once again demonstrating the North of Burcote Road site fails in the test of sustainability.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in December 2024 promoting more vision-led transport planning. The new NPPF requires Local Plans to deliver on the required sustainable transport interventions which benefit existing and future communities – not just provide access and highway improvements. It affirms that transport issues should be considered from the earliest stages of plan-making. The Draft Local Plan fails to do this regarding the North of Burcote Road site.

Towcester Town Council agrees with the NPPF that we need to design healthy and vibrant places for people and move beyond maximising the convenience of car travel, whilst recognising that at present the car may be the only realistic travel alternative that some people have. The NPPF requires Local Plans to ensure only the best schemes are promoted and delivered.

The NPPF creates a national position that a positive vision-led approach to transport it expects that developers and Local Authorities need to create their desired vision and then promote schemes and Local Plans which achieve this. It also states clearly that the context of each development needs to be assessed in terms of location and land use.

Towcester Town Council believes this should be done at the Local Plan stage and not left in the hope a Masterplan might find solutions to inherent problems with sites such as those existing at North of Burcote Road.

Towcester Town Council notes the key NPPF principles for walking and cycling include:

- **Prioritisation:** Planning policies must give priority to pedestrian and cycle movements, particularly within and connecting to new developments.
- **Infrastructure & Design:** Layouts should be safe, secure, and attractive, minimising conflicts with vehicles, avoiding street clutter, and catering to all abilities.
- **Sustainable Location:** Significant development should be focused on locations that are, or can be made, sustainable, encouraging every day, short-distance trips.

- **Vision-Led Planning:** The NPPF reinforces a "vision-led" approach, asking planners to define the desired, sustainable environment first, rather than just mitigating traffic.
- **Health and Accessibility:** Active travel is central to health objectives, aiming to improve public health by embedding physical activity into daily life.

In its brief description of the North of Burcote Road site, the Draft Local Plan does not take any account of the capacity of the local drainage system to cope with 1,400 additional homes. Silverstone Brook that runs along the edge of the site is already prone to flooding and 'balancing lakes' that have been constructed in Towcester to support recent developments have proved to be ineffective. Once again, Towcester Town Council believes that drainage and the potential for flooding should be fully considered at the Local Plan stage.

Archaeology of the Land North of Burcote Road - It has been noted by Towcester and District Local History Society (TDLHS), that archaeology is likely to be a major consideration in respect of the T3 site. TDLHS note its centre, adjacent to Swinneyford Farm is known to be the site of Roman villa, temple and mill that is likely to be of regional Importance as there is documentary evidence to suggest that this is where the famous Towcester Roman Head, now on display in the British Museum, was discovered. The extent of the villa buildings is not known. In addition to the Roman villa complex, there is the previously mentioned Alchester Road crossing the site from north to south and finds from the Neolithic period onwards have been discovered within this area.

Policy T4 - Land at Bell Plantation

The Town Council recommends that in respect of Towcester employment sites, **Policy T4, Paragraph F**, should read:

"Access to the employment site will be from the A5, or the A43, via the Land at Tiffield Lane (Policy T6) site;"

Towcester Town Council supports the allocation of a 6ha site for Towcester Town Football Club and WNC's commitment to supporting this development with contributions from its Community Infrastructure Levy.

Policy T7 - Towcester Racecourse

Towcester Town Council supports greater use of the Racecourse for suitable leisure activities, providing these are of high-quality design and fully compatible with its Grade II* listed parkland setting and its relationship with the Easton Neston Conservation Area. The Town Council would support more public access to the park, but not at the expense of additional housing, or any inappropriate development.

References

- West Northamptonshire's Local Plan (Regulation 18) Draft
- WNC Local Plan Viability Assessment, March 2025
- WNLP Site Selection Background Paper Appendix 3
- WNC's Sustainability Report prepared for the Draft Local Plan, January 2026
- WNC's Local Transport Plan 2025 to 2045
- WNC's Towcester LCWIP
- Towcester Town Transport Strategy, *Fit for Purpose*, published in 2013