

## The Lib Dems would build in rural villages

THE Liberal Democrats fired the opening shots in the 2023 local elections last week in the *NWN*'s article headlined 'Local Plan Review needs a rethink' where they say they disagree with the council's draft proposals for up to 2,500 houses on the fringes of Thatcham.

As they did with Sandleford 11 years ago, they see a political opportunity in opposing large scale housing but, as with Sandleford, they wait until the plans are well advanced before they object.

As always with this tactic, they are open to the question if not in Thatcham then where should the required additional housing go?

Eleven years ago they had no consistent alternative plan, but this time they say they do.

"We'll promote the idea of vibrant villages," said their planning spokesman councillor Tony Vickers.

"This means more housing," but he added as an afterthought, "but only where it won't spoil the natural beauty".

"We'll promote community-led schemes across the larger villages," said their environment spokesman, councillor Adrian Abbs.

As usual when logic gets distracted by political opportunism, the Lib Dems forget that a certain critical mass of houses is needed to fund the much-needed infrastructure (roads, schools, surgeries, shops, commercial buildings) they correctly say are a prerequisite to housing.

This is the positive concept

behind development in and near Thatcham, which was given a breather in the 2006-26 plan.

Now I'm sure this Lib Dem message of 2,500 more housing in the countryside, over and above the limited number already planned, will go down well in the likes of Hungerford, Lambourn, Pangbourne, Bradfield, Mortimer and Burghfield, to say nothing of the likes of Streatley, Basildon, Bucklebury, Cold Ash, Kintbury, Aldermaston, Hampstead Norreys, Compton, Hermitage, Chieveley, Inkpen and others...

Don't they realise that 74 per cent of West Berkshire where they want to build all these houses is a nationally protected Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty?

The good residents of Bucklebury and Cold Ash don't like the idea of so many houses in nearby Thatcham either, but how will they feel with maybe some 300 additional houses actually within Bucklebury/Cold Ash itself as an alternative?

Rural voters, don't say you haven't been warned.

**ALAN LAW**

**Conservative, Basildon ward  
West Berkshire Council**

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## Time to enter cat photo competition

WE will, as we have for the last 25 years, be running our cat photography competition and making 2022 cat calendars in aid of Basingstoke Cats Protection.

This year again we will have to judge as there will be no fair at Tadley for obvious reasons.