



West Berkshire Council
Development & Planning
Council Offices
Market Street
Newbury RG14 5LD

4th March 2023

Dear Sir/Madam,

WBC LPR Regulation 19 Objection

Local Plan Review 2022 – 2039, 2500 houses on land between north Thatcham and Upper Bucklebury (the Policy SP 17 "North East Thatcham Strategic Site Allocation").

Whilst I recognise the need for increased housing and the Government's requirements on local authorities to meet certain targets, I object to the development proposals on the following grounds.

Challenge the Need

The reduction in available land to develop has been reduced recently by the 30% increase in the areas of the DEPZ's around Aldermaston and Burghfield and I would urge WBC to challenge Central Government on the housing allocation.

Impact on the AONB

The proposal will close the gap between Thatcham and the AONB. This is contrary to the statements within WBC's own document 'North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (2002)', Policy SP8.

Should this unacceptable proposal go ahead, against better judgement, then it should be made a **Pre-commencement** Condition that the infra-structure to create the 'country park' buffer zone (ie set boundaries, tree planting, hedgerows etc.) be established and protected prior to any house building commencing. No consideration should be given to a Section 73 application to vary the Conditions or overturning them at Appeal. In addition, all built development should be limited to being below 95M above OD which is again in accordance with the above-mentioned WBC document (the current

proposal shows development up to 125 metres above OD, which would have a serious impact on the visual amenity in close proximity to the AONB. If this inappropriate over-development should be allowed to go ahead, a large proportion of the CIL monies should be spent on creating the country park / buffer zone, however a 'Country park' – this has a specific accepted definition which is not met in this Plan. The three small, isolated areas inside the proposed settlement boundary have no meaningful environmental value or commitment to exclude subsequent development

The pie chart which shows the amount of open space is misleading in that it indicates 50% open space but looking at the plans this is clearly not the case and must be also relying on the private garden areas and probably school playing fields as well. This is misleading. Clearly the 50% open space is not going to be available for public use.

Traffic

The traffic study included within the document is woefully inadequate and clearly based on inaccurate data and is a very un-academic piece of work.

Up to 5000 more cars (2 car spaces per household as required by WBC planning policy). This will lead to excessive pressure on existing narrow roads and ratruns through villages. There will be further congestion and waiting times at Thatcham level crossing and even more limited station parking, the wrong side of the level crossing.

The junction with the A340, Theale to Tidmarsh Road, near Englefield Estate is already highly congested and dangerous and this will be made far worse by the increased number of cars.

The proposed mini roundabout to serve the development on Harts Hill Road will become seriously congested at peak times, especially if the roundabout at the Mill Public House is fitted with the proposed traffic lights. This will cause tailbacks further up Harts Hill on the steep blind bend section which will inevitably lead to rear-end shunts.

Increased traffic through Upper Bucklebury and other villages

Non-Sustainable Location (Traffic)

The distance of the proposed development from Thatcham Station and the central amenities in Thatcham will necessitate residents using their cars. Parking in central Thatcham is already inadequate (as recognised by Thatcham Town Council).

Pressure on Existing Facilities

Number of houses now "at least 1,500" – From an initial site assessment of 2,500 of which 1,250 were to be built in the Plan period, this has now in fact increased to 1,500 houses because the Plan extends to 2039 rather than 2036 (as originally proposed).

The development will place excessive pressure on existing doctor and dentist surgeries, primary and secondary schools which are already working at capacity as the new facilities proposed will not be constructed in advance of the housing.

Use of Brownfield Sites and Existing Buildings

Prior to considering developing greenfield sites, full consideration should be given to developing brownfield sites and converting existing commercial buildings such as offices and retail premises (Overbridge Square, Newbury is a good example). The amount of space becoming available is currently increasing due to changes in working practices and online shopping (Covid/internet).

There is also a huge amount of vacant residential space above the high street retail premises and there should be incentives to encourage their development.

Ecology

The Pang Valley is a unique, precious and special environment and one of only 200 chalk-fed rivers in the world.

There is a huge loss of green field and open space which will lead to an increasing urbanisation of the area. This will also put additional pressure on the AONB in terms of increased traffic and light pollution, pedestrian footfall, littering, illegal use of off road vehicles on the Common and along the River Pang, all with the inevitable detrimental effect on local wildlife and their habitats and the special character of the AONB.

Consequential damage to the Common – increased footfall; increasing damage to an ecosystem of national importance

Greenfield development abutting an AONB with no up-to-date evidence nor strategy for positive impact and overall biodiversity gain

Lack of strategic gap between Thatcham and Bucklebury – Thatcham and Upper Bucklebury will effectively merge and Upper Bucklebury will lose its identity

Surface Water Run-off and Flooding

There is no question that the proposed development will have a massive impact on the flood risk to Thatcham.

Utilities Infra-Structure

The existing water, gas and electrical supplies and foul and surface water drainage systems are already stretched to capacity and this development would create unacceptable pressure leading to system failures.

I would strongly urge WBC to reconsider this potential development in light of these important considerations and the massive groundswell of public opinion against these proposals.

Ms T. Duffy.