

WBC LPR Regulation 19 Objection – SP17

Re Thatcham NE Housing Development

I, Richard Griffiths of [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] write to object to the proposed Thatcham NE Housing Development as I find the proposal unsound on the following grounds.

1.0 Transport

1. There will be increased pressure on the existing highway infrastructure from the additional people in the new housing wanting access to local attractions, public houses, and the walks across the Common
2. The housing development will generate increased traffic through the village which is already under pressure as a cut through from neighbouring settlements to local schools and for travel to the M4 and Reading. The roads locally have become rat runs avoiding the A4 and this will only get worse with this proposal.
3. This will generate further pollution and increased noise levels in a village setting within the North Wessex Downs AONB.
4. Although there is a traffic calming layout in the village, this is in effect groups up cars, lorries, agricultural vehicles at each traffic calming point producing constant streams of traffic which at busy times can make the road difficult to cross at prime travel times. Increased traffic generation from the additional traffic movements from the proposed development will cause logjams as increased traffic slows down through the traffic calming area.
5. Also, as I recently witnessed there are instances where individuals are becoming impatient with the traffic calming, overtaking slower streams of traffic travelling through Upper Bucklebury due to frustration at the slowed traffic putting other local road users including cyclists and pedestrians especially the elderly, dog walkers and children along with their parents going to school at great risk. Increasing the traffic through Upper Bucklebury will further prejudice and endanger the lives of the people who live here leading to further traffic calming solutions having to be implemented no doubt after an accident has occurred.
6. Upper Bucklebury is at risk of having to have a fast streamlined roadway removing the traffic calming to cope with the traffic avoiding the A4 which will destroy the character of the village.
7. The proposed scheme exacerbates an already dangerous problem as the route along Harts Hill Road between NE Thatcham and Upper Bucklebury lacks pathways, street lighting and is a fast but narrow winding road. Surface water constantly runs down and across Harts Hill Road and in winter this has the potential to freeze as happened earlier this year with increased traffic flow resulting in the likelihood of increased accidents and injuries. The proposed development will also place increased pressure on Thatcham itself and the A4 between Newbury and Reading. The A4 itself is regularly flooded with surface water runoff from the eilds adjoining this road.
8. Traffic approaching Upper Bucklebury via The Avenue is already a fast road where many drivers chance their luck to overtake slower drivers. With increased through traffic to Thatcham this will further endanger road users from speeding cars.
9. There is a lack of public transport serving the local communities and the increased housing will heighten this issue. Increased public transport in turn places greater pressure on the road systems.
10. All the above is contrary to WBC Strategic Environmental Assessment objective 4 – to promote and maximise opportunities for all forms of safe and sustainable transport.

2.0 Environment

1. There will be major adverse impacts on the North Wessex Downs AONB from siting a major housing development adjacent to it, which will prevent the continuing enjoyment of the existing local community and the many visitors that the area attracts through all seasons to the Commons woodland walks.
2. Although the area already attracts many visitors the intensification of visits from the increased population from the proposed NE Thatcham expansion will place pressure on the existing wildlife which may prove to be tipping point for the continued health of this fragile environment.
3. The existing ecosystems within the AONB are already fragile and just coping – the extra numbers of visitors will drive away wildlife and potentially fatally damage the remnants of old ecosystems reducing the quality and the purpose of the AONB.
4. It will also cause more roadkill of wildlife which is already frequent enough now.
5. This will in turn lead to greater traffic generation and the need for additional car parks to accommodate the increased number of visitors. These additional car parks will eat into existing woodland / heathland and could also lead to increased antisocial behaviour, vandalism and litter pollution.
6. For the above reasons new greenfield development abutting the AONB and the Common should be discouraged to protect and enhance where possible existing biodiversity.
7. There is a lack of evidence of current supporting ecological research or assessments provided for the proposal. There is insufficient detail to achieve an overall biodiversity gain from the scheme and lack of mitigation of the negative impacts new housing will have on existing wildlife and native plants. Bucklebury Parish Council have undertaken their own investigations into the existing flora and fauna which has highlighted the short comings of WBC position on this.

3.0 Lack of Strategic Gap between Thatcham and Upper Bucklebury

1. Each settlement needs to protect its individuality and so to prevent further development creep in the future by having defined boundaries that are protected from new development. This scheme is effectively allowing the blurring the lines between Thatcham and Upper Bucklebury defining these individual settlements which in time will become merged allowing developer lead schemes being approved by appeal.
2. The northern edge of the Bath Road and Floral Way should be retained as countryside and protected to prevent development creep from occurring for the foreseeable future with an effective green belt established to lie between the 2 settlements.

4.0 Number of Houses

1. The number proposed has been misleading as the Plan now extends to 2039 rather than 2036 giving rise to 'at least 1500' houses. There is insufficient clarity on the specific number proposed or the exact location of these houses within the red line boundary of the plans issued. The number could in fact be a lot more and could lead to developer lead proposals increasing the minimum number.
2. The infrastructure which should be provided to support the estimated of new people in the area has not been sufficiently assessed in respect of education facilities, healthcare and recreational facilities and may not be delivered over the lifetime of the Plan.
3. Consideration of alternative sites especially brownfield sites should be preferred before developing this greenfield site

4. I understand that the basis for assessing housing requirements is undergoing a consultation process meaning that a lower housing requirement for WBC could be reduced if the consultation recommendations allow. In the light of this it is best that the results of the consultation are obtained first, and that WBC should at least delay the consideration of the additional houses in this location if not stop it completely.

Richard Griffiths 02.03.2023