

Planning Policy
Council Offices
Market Street
Newbury
RG14 5LD



Dear West Berkshire Council

WBC local plan regulation 19 objection

Being a Thatcham born resident, I wish to offer my opinion on the Local Plan and the associated Regulation 19 consultation process.

There appears to be very little justification for the proposed devastation of the countryside to the north of Floral Way in Thatcham, bordering the parish of Bucklebury. This is a beautiful area of our countryside, home to a vast amount of wildlife and enjoyed by many people with their families and pets, using the footpaths through glorious open farmland.

The plan describes building an extremely large number of new homes (1500 – 2500) on this beautiful landscape without any sound justification or explanation of how this amount of people could live in and use the facilities in Thatcham or how the necessary infrastructure would be funded.

Thatcham has a population of around 26,000, living around a soulless former village, which has grown in excess of the amenities offered into a town. The residents currently struggle to get a GP appointment, cannot easily get a prescription made and queue in traffic for long periods. A number of the schools, particularly Kennet are at bursting point, the doctors surgeries are unable to cope with the number of patients and there is a lack of nursery provision. There could be up to 3500 to 4000 new residents on the proposed site, many with children, cars, and in need of a lifestyle that would attract them and provide all essential services needed to live in the area.

A proportion of the houses would be 'affordable', but what does that mean in reality? Social housing or the likely shared ownership schemes preferred by the developers.

The plan suggests that a new secondary school would be built in the north to serve the new housing, but with no indication of where and picking a funding figure out of thin air. There is a similar projection for a new primary school. I recall when Dunstan Park estate was built in the late 1990s there was space for a primary school, which subsequently was used for further housing.

There is no area of level ground within the development site. Excavating an area for playing fields and sports facilities to the north of the A4 Bath Road seems the only option, but where would the primary school go? Presumably on the same site? The pollution from the busy A4 would not be conducive to health of children or those using the area for recreation and sport.

The creation of a new health centre for the use of the new households is not a decision of the local authority or the future developers and has to be part of a larger strategy to provide these services by the health authority. Where will they find doctors, dentists, nurses, and medical professionals to work in these settings when they can't appoint these staff now, due largely to cuts in the NHS?

Such a large development would put strain on other local services, namely the ambulance and fire service, along with law enforcement. Thatcham lost its former Police Station several years ago. It is

unlikely that Thatcham's current sewage works in Lower Way could cope with the additional homes. Can Thames Water cope with the additional water supply? There are housing sites in Thatcham, both in Lower Way and at the bottom of Cold Ash Hill putting even more burden on these essential services.

Surely it would be better to offer plans to improve the current situation, both in the short and long term, for those loyal residents who remain living in this 'town'. Thatcham needs these things now, before even considering any further development. There is no comparison between facilities offered by Newbury to those in Thatcham.

The document states the "social infrastructure has not kept pace with housing growth". This is true and I can see no plans to put this right or reverse the current decline taking place in Thatcham as businesses and shops close. For example, the bowling alley sits decaying in Lower Way. With so little for young people to do, would it not be better to invest in their future rather than just bring far more young people to the area?

The plan states "the growth has been accompanied by infrastructure growth in transport" but this is not seen in reality. Thatcham has a tiny railway station with no facilities and two small car parks. It is not fit for purpose. After decades, the lack of a bridge at the level crossing remains the 'elephant in the room', causing delays and preventing traffic from moving easily to the south. There are buses, but these are few and far between and expensive. Thatcham is a town full of cars, yet the plan would bring thousands of additional vehicles to the overloaded road system. The villages of Cold Ash and Bucklebury have become rat runs enabling traffic to get to schools and places of work on route to Reading. Hundreds of new homes would increase the traffic levels to an amount that would damage the rural nature of the district, polluting the area of outstanding natural beauty situated to the north. Yet the assessment says that policies are likely to have a positive impact on road safety as that safe travel will be critical, but without telling us how this could be achieved.

In 3.1, there is mention of an exit from the north of the housing site onto Harts Hill Road, encouraging the traffic to use a dangerous road, narrow in places and without a pavement. Those using this route, cycling and walking to and from Bucklebury are encouraged to use a undesignated footpath across fields for their safety. We need safe travel now.

West Berkshire council predicts some displacement of A4 traffic onto wider rural routes such as Upper Bucklebury. Why would you encourage that? I am aware that a number of properties in Harts Hill Road are unable to even drive onto the road from their homes, without having to drive along the edge of a field to find a better exit with increased visibility. There appears to be no valid assessment relating to the impact these houses would have on the greater area of West Berkshire.

There is promise of a 'community park', whatever that may be, which is likely to have a detrimental impact on wildlife, flowers, trees and the landscape.

Improve what we have already and enhance the lives of the existing Thatcham residents instead of bringing new homes to the town. Where housing is needed throughout the district, look at brown field sites, not the destruction of the green fields that people value.

I find this plan totally unsound without any insight or forethought.

Kind regards

Clare Ockwell