

From: [REDACTED]
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: WBC Local Plan Main Modifications MM25 & MM26
Date: 30 January 2025 13:54:49

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[REDACTED]
30th January 2025

To West Berkshire Council

RE: WBC Local Plan Main Modifications MM25 & MM26

I am writing on behalf of my whole family to voice our concern and objection to the proposed development of 2500 home in North East Thatcham.

We are dismayed that the Government and therefore West Berkshire Council seems happy to forge ahead with this plan with little consideration for the hugely negative impact on the local communities.

The effects of this proposal are devastating for the town of Thatcham and I imagine there will be plenty of objections from its residents, but my arguments are principally focussed on the village of Upper Bucklebury and the adverse impact on our community.

Do we need it?

I understand the need for development and accept that we must build more homes, but I question the need to build as many as 2500 in Thatcham, irrespective of current targets. It seems a totally disproportionate allocation in an area where so little of the land is developable due to AONB and flood plains. The plans would have been in place well before the Covid pandemic, so would it not be sensible to review the requirements given the changing nature of our demographics and working patterns since then? If the plan was to house commuters to London, who knows how many will still want to, or be required to, work in London (or in any office) post-Covid? If the work pattern continues to favour a work-from-home arrangement, then who will be coming to live in these houses? Also, with the birth rate dropping and local primary schools not filling all classes in some year groups, will we see half empty classrooms in the proposed new school(s)? It will be more likely that the school(s) will not get built at all.

If, however, these new houses were purchased by keen commuters and assuming people returned to office work in London, I would be curious to see what plans are in place at the station to accommodate the hundreds of extra cars that would need to be parked there. Not everyone will be walking to the station and the facilities there would just not be adequate.

Amenities

New schools, together with shops and other leisure facilities, are part of the proposed plan. However, it is not clear at what stage these facilities will appear. Unless they are built first, there is the risk they will not be built at all since anyone already living in the new houses will necessarily have already found a school solution for their children. If the provision of infrastructure such as schools is dependent on house sales then we have a potential chicken and egg situation; schools will not be built until houses are sold, but houses will not be bought until there is a school built. If there is little perceived demand and with dwindling budgets at the end of the project, the schools may well not materialise.

Impact on Upper Bucklebury

It is impossible to overestimate the negative impact this development will have on the village of Upper Bucklebury. Whichever way you look at it, with the development creeping up the hill, Upper Bucklebury will all but merge with Thatcham, separated only by a small copse at the end of Long Grove. This cannot be a good thing for the identity of our village and for the peace, tranquillity, and security of our community.

The new Thatcham development and Upper Bucklebury would be linked via the footpath that currently runs from Long Grove to Colthrop. This has already seen increased footfall since the pandemic and will only increase with the new development as residents choose to walk, exercise dogs, ride bikes to the countryside to the north via Upper Bucklebury. Are the residents of Long Grove expected to continue to repair and maintain their road for the benefit of non-parishioners?

The inevitable increase of visitors to our village/parish and Bucklebury Common can only have a detrimental effect on our local environment. The ancient woodlands, meadows and wildlife surely need to be protected. Bucklebury Parish Council say on their website: " Loss of habitats or habitat change as a result of inappropriate management are one of the most damaging threats facing rare species in Berkshire. These habitats should be safeguarded wherever possible and appropriate advice sought on managing them to conserve the natural diversity of life and to halt the extinction of species diversity not only in Berkshire but also in the UK. "

If this development were to go ahead, these precious woodlands and rare habitats would almost certainly be under threat with a substantial increase in the visitor numbers – our woodlands would be a short hop for the residents of the new development compared to anywhere else in Thatcham and the surrounding area they could walk (or drive!) to.

Traffic

Has the government and West Berkshire Council considered the impact of increasing the traffic by potentially 5,000 cars through a small village on country roads especially with the many issues with the M4 and A4, which then encourage people to go on country routes? There are already many issues on Harts Hill, especially during the winter months, when it becomes dangerous. It will not take long before the increased congestion on the A4 and Floral Way (already congested at peak times) leads to more Rat Run traffic through our village. As well as environmental and noise concerns, many parents will be concerned for the safety of their children in the village especially as they walk to and from school. This planned development and these two issues of increased traffic and damage to the local environment in particular go completely against the 'Bucklebury Vision' which very

clearly emphasises a commitment to maximise rural conservation and protection from pollution, protect the environment for future generations to enjoy, conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape, resist any development that would create unacceptable levels of traffic, and so on. Sadly, I cannot see how this new development fits in with our parish's agreed 'Vision'.

Country Park

I am bemused by the idea of a proposed Country Park and have some reflections on this. Firstly, I am not sure why we need one at all. We are adjacent to vast Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty with magnificent vistas and miles and miles of some of the most beautiful walks you could wish for. I can only think it is to make us feel better about the development by creating a natural gap between 'us' and 'them'. The reality is more likely that it is a steep bit of land that would be too difficult and expensive to build on, so it is turned into a 'country park'.

It would be interesting to know what this park would look like. Steep slopes do not really lend themselves to informal recreation and I would also be curious to know if budget has been allocated to maintain it long term? All discussions around the county park and its protection seem very unclear and I think more detail and commitment are needed.

I am also surprised that there seems to have very little mention of biodiversity, which is surprising with a development of this magnitude. It is my understanding that with any development of this nature, there should be a percentage of net biodiversity gain. There was no mention of this at the presentation of how this would be achieved and it's hard to understand how it could given the amount of farmland that will be given over to housing and other amenities.

Conclusion

In summary, I would like to register my objection to these plans in the strongest terms. The impact on the village of Upper Bucklebury will be immeasurable. With increased traffic, a steady flow of visitors seeping in and the consequential damage to the local environment, the character of our peaceful village will change forever and not for the better.

I am urging West Berkshire Council to reconsider the development plans for Thatcham and strongly object to the allocation as you are entitled to do. Please fight the corner of your local communities and defend the 'Vision' that they are so keen to promote.

Thank you.

Duncan, Katie, Dominic & Theo Powell, 