

West Berkshire Local Plan Review 2023-2041 (adopted June 2025)

North East Thatcham Strategic Site Allocation

Policy SP14

North East Thatcham Strategic Site Allocation

Land as shown on the Policies Map is allocated for the delivery of a comprehensive, sustainable, low carbon, urban extension comprising of distinct neighbourhoods defined by their landscape and connected and contributing to Thatcham, and woven through with natural habitats and links. Proposals must demonstrate how the provision of all infrastructure, services, open space and facilities will meet the needs of the development and be delivered in a timely and co-ordinated way across the whole site alongside the phased delivery of residential development.

Homes

The site is allocated for the phased delivery of up to approximately 2,500 dwellings, with the final number of dwellings to be determined by the adopted Masterplan Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) required by this policy. These dwellings will comprise an appropriate mix of housing types, tenures and sizes having regard to policy SP15. In addition at least:

- 40% of dwellings will be affordable housing in accordance with policy SP16; and
- 3% of dwellings will be delivered via serviced custom/self-build plots.

Community

The site will provide a range of community facilities including:

- Local centres providing local retail facilities and small-scale business-use, including for community use;
- Primary healthcare provision and associated infrastructure, which is operationally and financially viable, the details of which should be agreed with the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB-ICB) or other such appropriate body, taking into account the feasibility study carried out by BOB-ICB. Further detailed feasibility work should be carried out at the applicant's expense in collaboration with BOB-ICB;
- Early years and primary school provision on site with land to be provided and build costs to be met by the applicant;
- Secondary school and SEND provision, including the provision of land and a financial contribution. The nature and cost of the required provision will be informed by a feasibility study, undertaken at the applicants expense and prepared in collaboration with the Council and local stakeholders;
- Community indoor facility to be used for sport and community uses with a variety of room sizes.

Green Infrastructure

The site will provide a comprehensive network of green infrastructure and public open space across the whole site in accordance with policy SP10 which will respond positively to the sensitivities of the landscape, protect and enhance landscape and biodiversity features of value within and around the site and make provision for biodiversity net gain. This provision will include:

- Conservation of the areas of ancient woodland by providing appropriate buffers between the development and the ancient woodland;
- Enhancements for biodiversity;
- A band of green infrastructure/new community park across the higher land on the northern part of the allocation (as shown on the indicative map) to be retained outside the settlement boundary. This is to create a buffer between the built development of the allocation and the adjoining countryside and the village of Upper Bucklebury to the north. The precise nature of the band of GI is to be informed by a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment and the masterplanning process, having regard to the location of the site within the setting of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape;
- Green infrastructure and public open space within the developed parts of the site in addition to the community park, taking into account the requirements set out in policy DM40;
- Greenways which connect through the site and facilitate connectivity to the wider landscape and the existing Public Rights of Way network;

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- A Public Rights of Way Strategy to demonstrate how existing Public Rights of Way will be protected and enhanced and how new ones will be established, including bridleway links and safe crossing points;
- Provision of allotments;
- Outdoor formal and informal sports pitches and areas; and
- A Green Infrastructure Strategy to show how the network of multifunctional green infrastructure will be delivered across the site to include a strategy for the protection of existing and provision of new trees, hedgerows and other appropriate native planting.

Transport

Measures will be included to improve accessibility by, and encourage use of, sustainable transport modes.

Development proposals for the site will be supported by a Transport Assessment and Travel Plan to provide detail on how this will be achieved, including:

- Active travel improvements on routes between the site, Thatcham town centre and the railway station;
- Multiple access points and a vehicular through route;
- Sustainable transport through routes;
- Mitigation of the development's impacts on the highways network with improvements to existing junctions where they are needed and delivery of new access points for all forms of movement and transport to the site at locations to be agreed with the planning authority;
- How adverse impacts on air quality will be minimised; and
- Promotion and encouragement of sustainable modes of travel, in accordance with policy DM45.

Sustainability

Development proposals for the site will be supported by an Energy Statement or a detailed energy section with the Sustainability Statement which will set out measures in accordance with policies SP5 and DM4.

A Construction and Operations Management Plan (COMP) to accompany any planning application on the site. The COMP shall safeguard any below ground infrastructure on the site from operational works, including the provision of an appropriate buffer.

Flooding and Water Environment

Development proposals for the site will be supported by a Flood Risk Assessment, in accordance with policy SP6, which will take into account the Thatcham Surface Water Management Plan and set out:

- Adequate flood mitigation measures to ensure there is no detrimental impact on flood risk in Thatcham;
- Surface water drainage management approaches that could deliver net gain for Thatcham town, including use of on-site sustainable drainage systems (SuDS); and
- Flood alleviation measures already present on the site and how they will be retained, protected and enhanced.

Development proposals also need to consider water resources and waste water in accordance with policy DM7.

Biodiversity

Development proposals for the site will be supported by a Biodiversity Strategy in accordance with policy SP11 which will set out:

- How biodiversity net gain will be achieved including through habitat restoration and linkages;
- How priority habitats and ecological features will be protected and enhanced;
- The creation of new ecological features; and
- A site-wide Biodiversity Management Plan.

Landscape

The site lies in the setting of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and will be developed in accordance with policy SP2 and the Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment (2021) for the site.

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Development proposals for the site will be supported by a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) in accordance with the Landscape Institute Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd ed. 2013. This will inform the Masterplan SPD which will determine the final capacity, design and layout of the site and requirements for green infrastructure and the provision of public open space.

Heritage

Development proposals for the site will be supported by a Historic Environment Strategy in accordance with policy SP9 to demonstrate how the site's historical development, archaeological remains and historic buildings and parkland will inform the scheme and help to create a sense of place.

Lighting

Development proposals for the site will be supported by a Lighting Strategy which will include consideration of dark skies, particularly in relation to the nearby North Wessex Downs National Landscape, and measures to mitigate the impact on biodiversity.

Mineral Resources

Development proposals for the site will be supported by a Mineral Resource Assessment (MRA) which identifies any potential viable mineral resources on the site and considers firstly prior extraction, and then incidental extraction as part of the development.

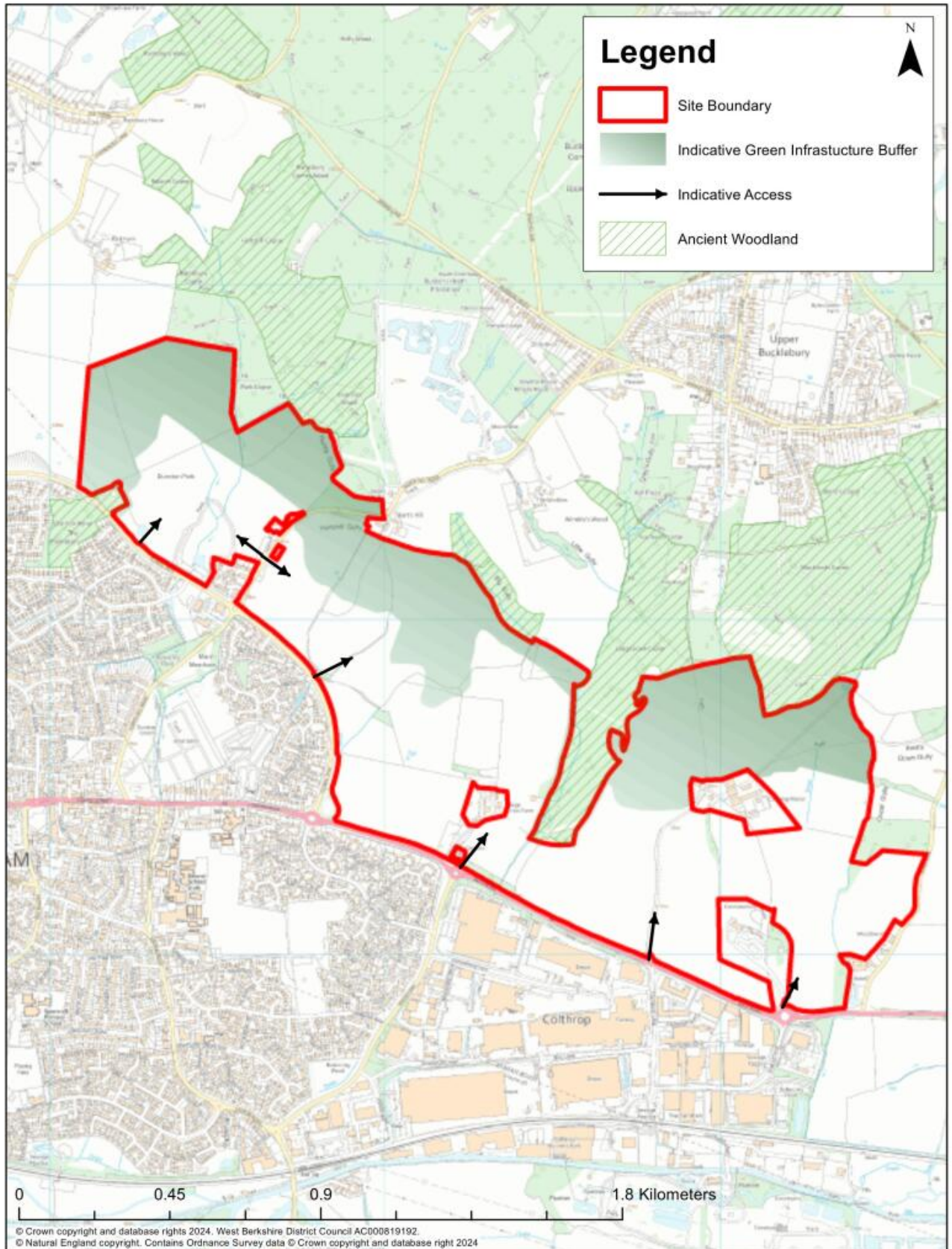
Masterplanning and Design Code

The site will be masterplanned and a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) prepared by the Council. The SPD will be funded by the applicant and prepared in collaboration with the applicant, relevant town and parish councils, the community and other stakeholders. The SPD will be adopted by the Council prior to the submission of a planning application. The Masterplan SPD will provide the framework to guide the development and should be based on the evidence base underpinning the Local Plan and outcome of further technical work prepared in line with requirements of this policy. The Masterplan SPD will determine the location and extent of built development, land uses, green infrastructure including the extent of the green buffer, key access arrangements, community and other infrastructure. Proposals must have regard to, and demonstrate how, they have been guided positively by the adopted Masterplan SPD.

A design code, prepared by the developer and agreed with the local planning authority, should be secured by a planning condition as part of any outline planning permission.

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Supporting Text

6.38 Thatcham has experienced rapid population growth during the post-war period, expanding more than 5 times since 1951. This growth has been accompanied by infrastructure growth in transport, and a considerable expansion in the built-up area to match the population growth. However, in recent decades, the provision of social infrastructure has not kept pace with housing growth.

6.39 The vision for Thatcham contained in the previous Local Plan was that Thatcham town centre would be a focus for regeneration, enabling the town to fulfil its role within the District's hierarchy of centres by improving the retail offer and enhancing the streetscape. The provision of leisure and community facilities for all ages would be improved and encouraged within the town centre. The town would become more self-contained providing a range of job opportunities and encouraging residents to shop and socialise locally. Additionally, the previous Local Plan concentrated housing expansion in Newbury.

6.40 The Thatcham Strategic Growth Study (TSGS)⁽⁸⁰⁾ was carried out in 2019 - 2020 to understand how to plan for growth in Thatcham over the plan period. The West Berkshire Strategic Vision 2050⁽⁸¹⁾ was drafted in 2022 to guide sustainable growth over the long term in the context of paragraph 22 of the NPPF published in 2021. These documents include relevant information that form part of the justification for the LPR's spatial strategy and the strategic allocations in Newbury and Thatcham.

6.41 This evidence draws on other evidence produced to support the LPR such as the Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (2019)⁽⁸²⁾ and the Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) (2020)⁽⁸³⁾. The TSGS shows that Thatcham compares poorly to other similar centres in terms of overall service provision, including public services and commercial services. The town's self-image is of a large village, rather than as a thriving market town.

6.42 In addition, it demonstrates that recent planning decisions support the approach that only growth of a strategic scale can support the service provision and regeneration that Thatcham requires.

6.43 The TSGS considers the sites promoted to the Council as part of the LPR and recommends that if strategic development were to occur in Thatcham, the most appropriate location to examine in more detail is the site promoted at North East Thatcham.

6.44 The western edge of the site is adjacent to the existing Thatcham settlement boundary along Floral Way and Bath Road (A4). The eastern end of the site is adjacent to Colthrop Industrial Estate, which is contiguous with Thatcham.

6.45 Stage 3 of the TSGS examines the North East Thatcham site in detail and, using community objectives which emerged during a community stakeholder workshop, provides context for how development could come forward at the site.

6.46 The Council's spatial strategy is outlined in policy SP1 and affirms a continued approach to focusing development in settlements in line with a District-wide settlement hierarchy (contained in policy SP3). Thatcham, as part of the Newbury and Thatcham urban area, is a sustainable location for development as confirmed in the Strategic Vision 2050. The TSGS shows the most sustainable way for development to come forward in the town and this policy draws on that evidence.

6.47 Hence, Thatcham is a focus for regeneration, for new housing and for improved provision of services and facilities. An urban extension to the north east of the town is allocated for development and will provide a new residential neighbourhood with supporting facilities and green infrastructure and enable long-term planning for Thatcham's future. Delivery of up to approximately 2,500 dwellings is anticipated, with the final capacity informed through the LVIA and masterplanning process.

6.48 The indicative site map shows locations for access points and for the band of green infrastructure buffer to the northern part of the site. The final location and extent of built development, access, landscaping and green infrastructure will be determined following the completion of further work such as LVIA and the Masterplan SPD required by policy SP14.

80 Thatcham Strategic Growth Study: <https://westberks.gov.uk/local-plan-evidence#site%20selection>

81 West Berkshire Strategic Vision 2050: <https://westberks.gov.uk/local-plan-evidence>

82 Landscape Character Assessment (2019): <https://westberks.gov.uk/local-plan-evidence#landscape>

83 Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment: <https://westberks.gov.uk/helaa>

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6.49 It is anticipated that approximately half of the site will be set aside as green infrastructure, to serve the new population at North East Thatcham and be retained in perpetuity, taking into account the site's location within the setting of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape. An area, across the north of the site, will provide a buffer between the new development and the existing community of Upper Bucklebury to the north and comprise an extensive area of multi-functional green space, which will protect ancient woodland and areas of ecological value while providing opportunities for informal recreation. In addition, green infrastructure will be provided within the areas of built development. Built development and the green infrastructure buffer should respond to the findings of the LVIA and ensure an appropriate form of development taking into account the constraints of the site, including below ground infrastructure. Areas of isolated development should be avoided.

6.50 The area of green infrastructure shown on the indicative map takes into account the landscape work undertaken to support the TSGS, and uses the 105m contour to the west and central portion of the site, with the 100m contour to the east. The gas pipeline across the north of the site is required to have designated standoff areas and given its location to the north of the site development to the north of the pipeline is not considered appropriate. The final extent of the green infrastructure buffer will be informed by the LVIA, and other relevant background work carried out to support the Masterplan SPD.

6.51 The settlement boundary for Thatcham is an exception to the settlement boundary review criteria set out in Appendix 2, and will be revised through a future Plan to reflect the extent of the built up area once that has been defined through the masterplanning and planning application processes required by policy SP14. Consideration of whether it is appropriate to designate a gap between Thatcham and Upper Bucklebury, in line with policy DM2, will be considered once the settlement boundary has been redrawn.

6.52 The site will deliver a number of community benefits, both for the new residents of the site and for existing residents of Thatcham. The community infrastructure required to support the development is set out in the policy, the specific details, including the location, size, phasing and funding arrangements will be determined through the planning application stage. There may be opportunities for community infrastructure to be provided off site, or for improvements to existing services or facilities to be made as a result of the development.

6.53 New education provision, including early years, primary and secondary provision will be required to support the needs of the development. Early years and primary provision will be provided on site. The requirements for secondary and SEND provision will be determined following the completion of a feasibility study which will consider the best solution for secondary education requirements in Thatcham. It is expected that land will be required on the site, and financial contributions to support delivery of the preferred solution.

6.54 Primary healthcare facilities should be provided, with associated car parking and landscaping. The facilities should be operationally and financially viable and take into account the feasibility study commissioned by the NHS Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB-ICB). The facility should provide room sizes that comply with the Department of Health Building Note 11-01 (or any successor documents). The provision and any contractual arrangement of the facility will need to be agreed as part of any planning application coming forward on the site. Where the onsite provision of a facility in accordance with this policy is not viable, the Council will expect other offsite mitigation measures, to ensure the primary healthcare provision can support the new population growth. The applicant should engage with the BOB-ICB at an early stage to discuss the details of any offsite provision. A further feasibility study, to identify other mitigation measures, would need to be carried out at the applicant's expense and any identified offsite mitigation measures will be funded by the applicant through developer contributions.

6.55 Flood risk and surface water drainage is a key consideration for Thatcham, following extensive surface water flooding in the summer of 2007 as a result of high intensity rainfall overwhelming storm drains and culverted streams. The flood event was considered to be in the order of a 1 in 200 year event. Following the flooding various studies and strategies were developed to identify opportunities for reducing flood risk in the town. The Thatcham Surface Water Management Plan (2010) sets out a number of proposed measures to reduce flood risk in Thatcham, focusing on retaining runoff upstream of Thatcham to reduce peak flows through the existing urban area and drainage system. A number of flood attenuation ponds have been constructed on the North East Thatcham site, and these are to be retained and enhanced in addition to Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) provided on the site. An Integrated Water Supply and Drainage Strategy involving localised and strategic flood management measures will be required, in line with the requirements of the West Berkshire Sustainable Drainage Systems SPD (2018)⁽⁸⁴⁾.

6.56 Below ground infrastructure is present on the site. The design and layout of the site will need to take their presence into account and appropriate stand offs will be required to ensure there is no impact on operational requirements.

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6.57 British Geological Survey data identifies that the site is underlain in part by construction aggregate mineral deposits. Therefore, a Minerals Resource Assessment will be carried out to determine the possibility of prior extraction of the mineral in accordance with the West Berkshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2022-2037.

6.58 The Council will lead the development of a Masterplan SPD, which will be produced in collaboration with the applicant, relevant town and parish councils, the community and other stakeholders and funded by the developer as part of a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA). It will be based on existing, and updated, evidence and information already produced to support the allocation of the site, including the Thatcham Strategic Growth Study. The Masterplan SPD will determine the location and extent of built development, land uses and green infrastructure including the extent of the green buffer, key access arrangements, community and other infrastructure. The Masterplan SPD will be adopted by the Council prior to submission of a planning application. It is the Council's intention that the Masterplan SPD will be adopted within 12 months of adoption of the LPR.

6.59 A Design Code will be developed alongside the planning application, secured by condition, and agreed with the Council prior to submission of the first reserved matters application.