

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

Policy DM2

Separation of Settlements around Newbury and Thatcham

In order to prevent the coalescence of Newbury and Thatcham and to maintain the separate identity of the distinct settlements around both towns, the following gaps between settlements have been identified and are outlined on the Policies Map:

- a. Land between Newbury and Donnington
- b. Land between Newbury and Enborne Row/Wash Water
- c. Land between Newbury and Thatcham
- d. Land between Thatcham and Cold Ash
- e. Land between Thatcham and Ashmore Green.

Development which would detract from the open or rural character of these gaps will not be permitted. In these areas development will only be permitted where it:

- i. Would not diminish the clear physical and visual separation between distinct settlements; and
- ii. Would not compromise the integrity of the gap either individually or cumulatively with other existing or proposed development.

Supporting Text

9.8 The overarching spatial strategy for the LPR set out in policy SP1 focuses development on Newbury and Thatcham. This pressure for development has the potential to lead to the loss of the separate and distinct identity of both settlements and the settlements surrounding them through coalescence. This could either be by physically or perceptually reducing the gaps between them or by introducing an increase of activity which has an urbanising effect. The visual break and sense of openness between these settlements is very important in maintaining the separate identity of individual communities and the Council considers it important that the integrity of this openness is maintained.

9.9 An Appropriate Countryside Designation Study (2022)⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ was therefore undertaken of the countryside around Newbury and Thatcham to help determine whether a specific planning designation was needed to safeguard the unique characters and separate identities of the individual settlements. This concluded that should the Council specifically define the particular gaps it wanted to protect, that it would be justified in creating a new green gap policy.

9.10 Gaps are a long established planning tool used to prevent the coalescence of settlements in order to maintain their separate identity. A clear gap between distinct settlements helps maintain a sense of place for residents of, and visitors to, the settlements on either side of the gap. They prevent development in areas where there is the greatest risk of coalescence and so ensure that by retaining a sense of openness, local distinctiveness is maintained.

9.11 The identified gaps set out in the policy have not been specifically defined to protect the landscape character of the countryside around Newbury and Thatcham, the Council's approach to which is set out in policy SP8. It is important to recognise that the gaps are not a local landscape designation. Landscape character assessment can be used however to inform and understand how the settlement pattern has developed, the nature of the individual character and setting of each distinct settlement, the pattern of the separation between them and how the landscape functions to maintain that separation.

9.12 The land included within each identified gap performs an important role in defining the settlement character of the area and separating settlements at risk of coalescence. In defining the extent of a gap, no more land than is necessary to prevent the coalescence of settlements has been included.

9.13 Currently, the parcel of land between Thatcham and Upper Bucklebury does not meet the criteria for designation as an essential gap. However, the Council acknowledges that this situation may change depending on how the North East Thatcham strategic site is delivered. The relationship between the proposed development and the country park

109 Appropriate Countryside Designation Study (2022): <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/local-plan-evidence>

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to the north of the site will be critical in this regard. In accordance with the recommendations made in the Appropriate Countryside Designation Study (2022), further assessment as to an appropriate essential gap in this area will need to be carried out when the extent of the built development on the site has been established.