



WBC LPR Regulation 19 Objection

Dear Sir,

I wish to strongly object to the SP17 proposed development of 1500 houses in NE Thatcham on the following grounds:

Traffic

There is already substantial traffic passing through Thatcham in the rush hour, along both the A4 and Floral Way. This proposed development will increase the number of car journeys as people travel to and from work, as it is unlikely that there will any new employment opportunities created locally as a result of this proposal.

For traffic that wishes to join the M4 at Junction 13 (Chieveley), or head north on the A34, people will not follow the A4 to Newbury, and it is likely that these traffic flows will instead be up Harts Hill, into Upper Bucklebury and through the surrounding villages ie Cold Ash and Hermitage. It is likely that there will also be increased traffic through Chapel Row and Southend Bradfield, as cars look to avoid the A4 going eastbound to the M4 at Junction 12. These roads are generally winding country roads with no footpaths and are not designed, or have the capacity, to handle the additional traffic, leading to the potential of serious accidents particularly with walkers and cyclists. The inclusion of an access road and car park from the development directly onto Harts Hill will only encourage traffic to avoid the A4, and create more rat runs through the villages to the north of Thatcham.

For traffic that wishes to go south towards Basingstoke and Winchester (greater employment opportunities), then this will flow over the already congested Thatcham level crossing, where traffic regularly queues for 10 mins or more today when the gates are closed. The result will be that the queues will only get worse with more traffic, which will have a significant impact on air quality as engines are left running whilst stationary and queueing.

There has been no (or limited) modelling of what the traffic impact on surrounding villages will be as a result of this development, nor will it improve safety or encourage people to walk or cycle. Neither is there anything in the plan to encourage the use of public transport or use of Thatcham railway station, which is probably too far for people to walk to. Also, there is very limited car parking available, particularly on the north side of the railway line.

Environment

This development is on a greenfield site and will result in the loss of agricultural land. Brownfield sites should be developed first, before destroying agricultural land and a valuable wildlife habitat. There is nothing in the proposals that will enhance the ecology and biodiversity of either the actual site or the surrounding countryside and will actually have a negative impact. The proposed site is adjacent to AONB land, and Bucklebury Common is already suffering from damage caused by 4x4's and off-road motor bikes. With an estimated 4000 residents that will need access to green space for exercise and recreation, there is the strong possibility that Bucklebury Common will become a 'playground' and the fragile eco-system will be permanently destroyed.

There is no detailed information on how the proposed 'community parks' will either enhance or protect the biodiversity of the surrounding countryside, and will probably be just a grassed area with a few trees, and will not replace the natural habitat that will be destroyed.

There should be a strategic/defined gap between Thatcham and Bucklebury to protect the rural identity of Bucklebury, as WBC have put in the plan for elsewhere. Should this development go ahead then the remaining gap will become so small that Upper Bucklebury will eventually become a suburb of Thatcham.

There has been little work done to identify the impact on wildlife and species that will be affected by the development, and so it is difficult to see how WBC can state that there will be a positive impact to the environment. As they haven't identified what is there today, how can they mitigate against it and say that there will be a positive environmental outcome?

Infrastructure

One of the claims of WBC is that there needs to be a large single development to be able to provide and fund the supporting infrastructure that will be needed to cater for an increase in population of 4000 inhabitants. Primarily this should fall into the following 3 areas of infrastructure provision:

- a) **Public Transport** – there is nothing in the proposal that will increase the provision, or improve the use of public transport, and it is likely to just increase the use of private cars and all the issues that this brings regarding safety, congestion and pollution.
- b) **Healthcare** – existing GP practises are already at capacity, and there is already insufficient dental care available within Thatcham to support the current population. There is nothing in the proposal that will address dental care provisioning, nor GP services, apart from offering a small site to the local health authority in the hope that they will do something with it. There has been no discussion or consultation with the local health authority to see if this will be a viable option, both from a practical and economic point of view for delivering health care services within Thatcham.
- c) **Education** – there is no coherent strategy in the document on how education is going to be provided from early years through to 6th form. There are vague statements such as 'the site will provide Early Years provision' but no detail as to when it will be provided, and in what form it will take, so it is impossible to understand if the provision will be adequate or sustainable. For secondary education there is just the statement that a sum of £15M will be provided by the developers towards secondary education. There are no details provided as to whether this is going to be a new facility, where it would be located, or if the money will be spent improving the existing secondary schools in Thatcham, where there is little space for additional capacity at Kennet School. Without a clearly defined plan for education facilities there is a high probability that houses will be built long before there are any new educational facilities to support the increased population.

Alternative sites

There are many brownfield sites within West Berkshire that could be developed, and the cumulative sum of all these smaller developments would meet a significant proportion of the new housing requirements for WBC. In particular there is the Colthrop proposal which would develop an existing brownfield site, and would also have the benefit of providing a bridge over the railway line at Thatcham, which will bring a significant improvement to the congestion and pollution that exists today at the level crossing. For reasons unknown, WBC have ignored any requests to look at alternative housing provisions and seem intent on dumping a minimum of 1500 houses on the edge of Thatcham on a greenfield site.

In summary there is very little supporting documented evidence to demonstrate that WBC have considered the detrimental impact the SP17 Thatcham NE development will have on both Thatcham and the surrounding villages and countryside.

Yours sincerely

Ian Pratt

