

## WBC LPR Regulation 19 Objection - SP17

With regards to the West Berkshire Council Local Plan Review 19, that covers the Thatcham North East Development.

I wish to **strongly object** to these plans on the grounds that the plan is in my view **unsound** and will result in a **massive negative impact** in the surrounding area should these plans be passed.

As a resident of [REDACTED] for [REDACTED] years I am appalled at what will become of the local area should the Thatcham NE Development plans be implemented.

This **plan is ill thought out** with the West Berks Council opting to take the easy option and dump several year's government housing targets onto one area without any regard for anything else than trying to satisfy government mandatory house building targets which the government has decided to drop as of January 2023.

No accurate up to date data is available such as traffic data, educational data etc.

No consideration has been given to the local biodiversity and major question exist over supplies of various utilities.

The following will help to explain my objection :-

### Road & Transport

A Safe and Sustainable Transport system must be a major priority in any development plan and I do not believe this is the case with the current proposal.

Rather than reducing accidents and improving safety my opinion is that the plan will do the very opposite.

I have not been able to find any recent traffic flow census data.

I understand that a traffic census was taken for and supplied to WBC by the development company involved with the proposed development.

However, this data will have been completely flawed as it was carried out during the Covid 19 lockdown period when travel was severely limited and would have not presented a true accurate picture of traffic at that time if Covid was not present and travel not restricted.

I also understand that WBC are not intending to carry out any new census and will use the flawed and out of date data, and that Bucklebury Parish are attempting to carry out their own census at their own cost.

Unfortunately data is not yet available.

Why such important data relevant to a major development has been left to a local parish council only leads me to conclude that WBC do not want true accurate data to be used that may have a negative result on the development plan.

Until accurate data can be produced then no one is in a position to forecast the impact of the proposed development.

The local roads around Thatcham and its closest villages are already very congested during the busy times of the day such as the morning rush hour, after the school day and the evening rush hour.

As Thatcham has grown over the years, the road system that supports the area has not kept up with the increase in residential development. This has resulted in traffic congestion on both the major route A4 Bath Road as well as minor roads supporting the villages such as Upper Bucklebury, Cold Ash, Chapel Row, Midgham, Crookham and Woolhampton to name a few.

The A4 Bath Road has become more congested as the local population has continually grown with many large developments being built in and around the Thatcham area and that will continue to grow with the many additional developments already in the WBC building pipeline.

Traffic is using the small roads & lanes through the villages as "rat runs" more and more to avoid the congestion on the A4.

This is very apparent with the volume of traffic now passing through Upper Bucklebury.

The proposed development will only increase this traffic causing serious potential problems for the village populations such as noise, pollution, congestion etc.

It should also be noted that some of the roads through the villages are not in the best condition. Unless a huge amount of work is carried out to upgrade the road system there will never be a safe route to complement the A4 Bath Road in managing the traffic flows around the local area.

Thatcham has a major traffic restriction that is caused by the railway crossing at Thatcham station. For years it has been well known and recognised that the level crossing causes huge traffic congestion and delays due to the frequent train schedule of trains running on the main London to West of England routes. I have personally seen the traffic queued north up Pipers Way from the level crossing almost reaching the A4 Bath Road and south of the crossing towards up Crookham Hill towards Thornford Park Hospital. Often at busy times times the queue isn't able to clear before the next train causes the crossing to close again.

For the last 40 years or more there has been discussions on building a bridge to rectify this problem but nothing has ever come of this proposal. The Americans with Greenham Common and Kennet Heath development are a few examples.

The addition of 2500 houses very close to Pipers Way will only add to major congestion in the area.

Looking at the NE development plan there is only one major road that borders development area which is the A4 Bath Road.

The other roads that surround the proposed development area are Harts Hill Road, Floral Way, Cox's Lane and Lawrences Lane all are which totally unsuitable to support any increase in traffic.

Also Floral Way and Bath Road are the only roads that have pavements and street lights.

As mentioned above A4 Bath Road is very busy during several periods of the day. 2500 houses adding its traffic to this road will do nothing other than add to the congestion. I suspect that this will result in more traffic opting to use alternative "rat runs" through the various villages to avoid the A4 Bath Road.

Harts Hill Road is a very dangerous road with a history of road traffic accidents including fatal accidents. The road suffers from poor drainage as well as water run off from the fields next to it.

Most of the accidents are not reported and never recorded as drivers recover their vehicles without help from the authorities so statistics will not give a true record of accidents.

The road is a narrow road that has slowly been widened by erosion of the banks over the years from increased traffic using the road both cars and HGV's; or by design to accommodate larger vehicles.

This can be seen as additional drains have been installed to the nearside of the existing original drains to enable water run off at the edge of the road as the original drains are now within the road.

Whenever a cycle uses Harts Hill Road, the traffic can only follow at the speed of the cycle due to the width of the road and the amount of bends in the road which restricts safe overtaking of the cycle. This is a big problem going north as the road is going up hill and travel at a very slow pace.

Harts Hill also lacks a pavement and street lights and pedestrians that walk this road are in serious danger.

Floral Way connects Harts Hill Road to the A4 as well as Lawrences Lane and Cold Ash Hill.

Although this is a good road it would only feed traffic to the next bottle neck.

Lawrences Lane is a single track road which now has restricted access and if improved would only provide a route to Cold Ash, Upper Bucklebury and Thatcham.

Cox's Lane is again a single track road from the A4 to Upper Bucklebury and Midgham and no more than a track.

All the roads mentioned would require major upgrades and improvements to support the development plan but would only route traffic to and through the adjoining villages which will then become bottlenecks to the traffic flow.

## **Educational Facilities**

The current schools and other educational services are in the main totally full and for the development plan that has been proposed significant investment must be made available to support such a plan. There is no clear evidence of sufficient proposed funding to meet the councils obligation to provide education.

The current plan appears to be suspect with the plan being based on old out of date data. No information on funding for either the current Kennet School or a new Kennet School seems to be available.

The same can be said about details of a proposed new Kennet school such as location etc. In fact no clear plan exists regarding local schools to support this development or to enhance existing schools to support the expected increase in pupil numbers.

The rumours are that a new replacement Kennet School could be built on the Development site and the existing Kennet School be sold off for housing to help fund this new build. This should it happen will of course increase the pressure on whatever school provision are to be provided due to more additional housing above and beyond the development plan as well as additional pupil numbers.

If a new replacement school was to be provided then this would result in most of the Kennet School pupils having to cross the busy A4 Bath Road several times a day. Therefore a safe method of crossing the A4 would have to be provided.

Sports fields will have to be provided should a new school be built.

Non of the development site is a flat site with the land rising towards the north and towards the east. The flattest land is around Floral Way and alongside the A4 which will be exposed to the most traffic pollution.

No funding appears to be made for the addition of sports fields.

Upper Bucklebury is currently in the catchment area for Kennet Secondary School as well as The Downs School in Compton.

Most local children attend the Kennet School due to its close location and ease of access.

If the development goes ahead then our local children will be excluded from Kennet and will have to travel to Compton or further afield since the children of the NE development will take priority as they will be closer to the Kennet School.

My understanding is that Kennet is at 100% capacity and that the Downs School is over subscribed. This will then leave the children of Upper Bucklebury having to travel even further distance outside its current catchment area.

Primary Schools will also be impacted as will Early Years provision.

I am not sure what if any plans have been made to address education support for these groups.

## **Utilities**

### **Power**

Can the current provider of electrical power (SSE ?) be able to supply the additional requirements of the proposed development plan?

I ask this question as planning was submitted to WBC in 2017, Application Ref 1701012/FUL, to allow gas fuelled generation plants to support the National Grid and to be located in Upper Bucklebury.

From memory these units were to be used as emergency power units should the National Grid be unable to maintain supply to the local area.

This application was withdrawn during the planning phase but it does suggest that there was and maybe still is a question over the reliability and capacity of the local electrical supply.

## **Water & Sewage**

Can Thames Water cope with the additional load for both clean water and sewage?

With an estimation of somewhere around 4,000 people living within the development plan area a substantial increase of clean water and sewage disposal will be required.

The residents of Upper Bucklebury suffered for years with unreliable water supply which was eventual resolved with a new pumping station at the bottom of Harts Hill Road and replacement water supply pipes.

Will this development add additional load to this pumping station or will specific measures been applied to protect the supply to Upper Bucklebury, Chapel Row and area?

Can the sewage treatment works on Lower Way Thatcham take the addition load from yet another large development supporting up to 4000 people?

## **Flood Prevention**

Upper Bucklebury is approximately 134 meters above sea level and the A4 Bath road 70 meters.

Will any flood prevention measures be required to protect the proposed development as well as the area to the south of the A4?

The reason for this question is that during periods of heavy rain fall a tremendous amount of water runs down the land towards the A4.

So much water that that areas of land towards the lower end actually heave upwards and form a sort of mushroom some 2 to 3 meters across and 30cms high. It is possible to stand on these mushrooms and jump up and down and it feels like jumping on a water bed.

These mushrooms eventually disappear after a day or two.

The water will still be required to go somewhere but where if the land is covered in houses and hard surfaces.

Storm drains could guide it away from houses but it will still need to be managed carefully to prevent a torrent cascading down to the A4.

## **Medical Services**

### **GP Surgeries**

The current development plan appears to have little detail or plans for providing Medical Services other than a possible GP Surgery.

From personnel experience I know just how difficult it is to get an appointment at my GP Surgery at Thatcham Medical Centre.

This is the same for other residents who use the GP Surgery at Chapel Row and the GP Surgery at Burdwood in Thatcham.

Our local GP Surgeries are under tremendous pressure from both patient numbers and staff shortages. I know from talking to Healthcare professionals just how difficult it is to recruit medical staff such as doctors, nurses etc., to this area.

As Thatcham has continued to grow over the years the local surgeries have had to take measures and move patients to other surgeries to accommodate new patients that are moving in to their catchment area. With up to another 2500 houses additional Healthcare Facilities will be required.

Any plan must meet the local demand as laid down by the Healthcare Agencies which doesn't appear to have happened with this development plan.

### **Dental Practices**

Dental Practices are in the same position as the GP Surgeries.

Trying to register as a patient on either an NHS or Private Dental Practice is difficult due to the practices being at full capacity.

The development plan seems to have ignored Dental Practices completely

## **Environment**

This proposed development is entirely on a Greenfield Site that is currently on agricultural land spread over 3 farms.

Why is WBC trying to build on agricultural greenfield sites when other brownfield sites are available such as Colthrop as an example?

Surely with all the pressure on using brownfield sites before building on greenfield sites it makes no sense not to use brownfield sites within West Berkshire.

The proposed site is within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). This AONB is home to many rare and endangered species that are legally protected, and as such this area should be a protected landscape. Developments should not be carried out that will result directly in habitat destruction that is currently supporting these endangered species.

The development plan does not have any strategy documents to support the protection of this landscape. The value of the area for wildlife and potential effects on biodiversity appear not to have been properly assessed within the development plan.

With no adequate green spaces being provided within the development plan other than a vague proposal for two community parks this would indicate that WBC has at best very little commitment to recreation requirements of the residents as well as protecting the biodiversity within an AONB.

Without any real plans for green spaces, parks or other recreational areas it can be expected that residents of the development area will seek other areas such as Bucklebury Common for recreational purposes bringing additional traffic etc., as well as increased disturbance to the biodiversity in these areas. No funding provisions are mentioned in the plan for green spaces.

