

From: [REDACTED]
To: [PlanningPolicy](#)
Subject: WBC LPR 2022-2039 : Regulation 19 Objection
Date: 28 February 2023 12:11:35

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I wish to state my objections to the above plan, with specific reference to [Policy SP 17](#), the proposed North-East Thatcham Development. I wish to do so via this email as I was disappointed to find that the Council's web tool for this task is overly complex, unhelpfully inflexible and a positive discouragement to the submission of comments by ordinary citizens.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Placing a housing estate over an area of countryside spells doom for many species of plants and creatures in that area. To claim that there would be a "net biodiversity gain" is surely ridiculous and I challenge West Berkshire Council (WBC) to substantiate that claim with real evidence from other housing developments.

Within the area in question, which I walk regularly with my dog, I see hares, foxes, badger spoor and numerous species of bird, also various woodland and meadow plants for which I am too ignorant to know the names. The small areas of "country park"/"community park" proposed in the development's boundary would not contain this diversity. As evidence to support that assertion, I look to the "green" areas in place on the edges of Thatcham's existing modern housing estates, with which I am also familiar as a walker, e.g. the land between the southern developments and the railway/canal, or to the north/north-east at the sides of the Harts Hill Road between Floral Way and the A4. I invite WBC to commission a wildlife survey in those areas. I know that it will reveal massive quantities of litter, but very little wildlife. That is the sad reality of a small green area alongside a housing estate.

In this regard, I believe that the SP17 proposal is unsound but also that it contravenes the spirit, and quite possibly some aspects, of the 2021 Environment Act.

THE AONB, BUCKLEBURY COMMON

This Government's 2019 manifesto included a pledge to deliver "the most ambitious environmental programme of any country on earth" and its 2021 Environment Act was headlined as "a world-leading programme for nature recovery". Yet WBC proposes a vast housing development alongside a small and fragile Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Bucklebury Common, with all the inevitable negative impact that would entail.

A taste of that impact was seen during the 2020 COVID lockdown, which greatly increased the numbers seeking outdoor recreation locally. In the woodland and open common ground, along the footpaths and bridleways, and the many informal paths that weave across Bucklebury Common, the impact of a dramatically increased footfall was everywhere visible. New sections of paths were trampled through the woodland to get round stretches of original path churned to a quagmire by the volume of feet and wheels. Informal paths, previously nothing more than faint tracks, became broad swathes. Plants were trampled, occasional/seasonal water courses disrupted and diverted, ground-nesting birds disturbed or discouraged, sightings of deer and other mammals noticeably fewer. And a large increase in litter offered danger to those creatures that did stick around. New unofficial parking spaces were created at the sides of lanes, crushing verges, shrubs and saplings.

The building of any houses on the NE Thatcham site would undeniably increase the volume of road traffic using the lanes across the Common as a "rat-run". There is nothing in the proposal's Transport Assessment to suggest any measures to limit or prevent this, nor indeed any evidence of an assessment of likely impact in this regard. The volume of traffic on these lanes is already unacceptable in terms of its impact upon the AONB's wildlife. Inherent in a new housing development of any size, there would also be an increase in levels of artificial light at night, regardless of the proposed attempts to mitigate this, and with consequent negative impact on nocturnal species of mammals and birds.

WBC has a legal obligation to "conserve and enhance" AONB's in its domain but instead it plans a development which would unquestionably result in a massive further increase in the recreational use of Bucklebury Common AONB, and thus in the human impact upon the Common's flora and fauna. Unsound and not legally compliant.

HUMAN SAFETY

The volume of traffic cutting through the lanes on Bucklebury Common is a hazard to human safety too. Those same lanes are popular with walkers and cyclists but are mostly narrow, winding and devoid of either pavements or streetlights. Increased traffic flow would undeniably increase the risk, the likelihood, of injury or death in road accidents. This would fly in the face of both national initiatives and WBC's own Local Transport Plan that aims for "zero" such events.

And quite how WBC supports its claim that this development would "have a positive impact on road safety" is unimaginable to me, and also presumably to the Council itself as no genuine evidence is offered to support that

statement. It is clearly nonsense as a forecast of expectations, furthermore I feel that WBC is guilty of a gross misrepresentation of the truth in this matter.

SEWERAGE

I witnessed a detailed report, given at a meeting in December 2022 in the Upper Bucklebury Memorial Hall, which described the Newbury/Thatcham main sewerage infrastructure in terms that implied it is very close to maximum capacity, or perhaps already exceeding that. Present at that meeting was WBC's Executive Director responsible for planning. He (Mr Owens) raised no argument with the facts and statistics presented on this subject and nor do I see anything in the SP17 proposal to reassure me that any action is intended to address this apparent infrastructure shortcoming. This too makes the SP17 proposal unsound.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Publicly available statistics, coupled with patient experience, confirm that the area's general practice surgeries are overloaded and struggling to cope with their current patient numbers. In the event that the SP17 development were to go forward at any size, if there were no provision of a major new facility then medical services to the local population would surely collapse, to the very serious detriment of all residents.

And yet I see no promise of this, and no Health Impact Assessment, in the development proposal. The same must be said also in respect of dental services, which are likewise confirmed as inadequate in this area. WBC must surely have a moral obligation, if not a legal one as well, to avoid such a situation arising. As it stands, the implications of SP17 for medical services in the wider Thatcham area render the proposal dangerously unsound.

NATIONAL FOOD SECURITY

The countryside over which this development is proposed is currently to a large extent farmland, seemingly quite fertile if the crops of recent years are anything to go by. The deletion of such land is clearly at odds with central government's rather wider view – the imperative for greater UK food security as highlighted by the supply-chain events of the past few years and most especially the war in Ukraine. The Government is committed to ensuring that our country "a healthy and sustainable domestic food supply-chain" (PPS to Environment Minister, 4 October 2022) and growing crops in our own fields must surely be at the heart of this; the more so given how much emphasis is now placed upon shifting from meat to vegetables in our diets. Is WBC blind to all this?

CONCLUSION

I consider the NE Thatcham Housing Development Plan SP17 to be fundamentally flawed, disturbingly unsound and therefore utterly irresponsible, for the reasons given above, and I would willingly attend a public enquiry on the matter.

Joseph Kelly

