



Proposal to introduce a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) in Thatcham Town Centre

CONSULTATION SUMMARY

Summary of a consultation which asked for views on a proposed Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) in Thatcham Town Centre

April 2022

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SUMMARY

This report summarises the responses to a public consultation undertaken by West Berkshire Council. West Berkshire Council was asked to consider the introduction of a new Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) for Thatcham town centre. The consultation asked for views on a restriction to reduce anti-social behaviour.

The consultation was live for six weeks, from 21 February to 3 April 2022. An online survey was made available on the Council's website and hardcopies of the survey were made available at Thatcham town council offices and Thatcham library for those who live, work and visit Thatcham town centre. QR codes were also displayed on the leaflets and a number of 'pop up events' and engagement activities took place.

The consultation received 282 responses.

We found that:

- A large majority of respondents supported the proposed restrictions. 84.67% of respondents who answered the question, supported the proposed anti-social behaviour restriction.
- The majority of comments received were statements in support of the proposed Order. Of the people that responded to the question, 9.49% did not support the anti-social behaviour restriction.

Based on the feedback received, there is support to make a PSPO for Thatcham town centre.

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BACKGROUND TO THE CONSULTATION

West Berkshire Council undertook this consultation after receiving a request from Thames Valley Police (TVP) to consider the introduction of a new PSPO for Thatcham town centre.

Under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 applications for PSPOs can only be made by a local authority after consultation with the police, Police and Crime Commissioner, the owner or occupier of land within the restricted area and any other community representatives deemed appropriate.

PSPOs are designed to stop individuals or groups committing anti-social behaviour and allow local authorities to target specific anti-social behaviour offences that occur in public areas. Orders can be tailored to the needs of a local area.

In view of this legislative requirement and at the request of TVP, the Council felt that it was appropriate to consider the introduction of a new PSPO, consult and seek views on the proposal which was based on supporting evidence that the new restriction was justified and proportionate.

The Order proposed for Thatcham town centre would restrict anti-social behaviour. If created, it would give authorised officers (for West Berkshire this would be police officers and Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs)) the power to issue fixed penalty notices of up to £100 to people who breach the restriction:

- *Under the anti-social behaviour restriction a breach would occur if a person does not leave the restricted area when requested to do so by an authorised officer for a specified time, not return to the area for a period not exceeding 24 hours' if they are behaving in a manner that has caused, or is likely to cause, nuisance, harassment, alarm or distress.*

CONSULTATION METHODOLOGY

The proposal to consider the introduction of a new PSPO for Thatcham town centre was published on the Council's website on 24 February 2022. This included a draft Order, background information and a summary of the evidence supporting the proposed restriction.

Local residents were encouraged to comment on the proposed order by completing a short online survey (Appendix A). Hard copy of the survey were also made available in the reception area of Thatcham town council and Thatcham library. Appendix B shows the consultation plan.

The consultation was live for six weeks and closed on 3 April 2022.

For this consultation, an additional resource by way of a Consultation and Engagement officer was available and proved to be extremely beneficial. This is reflected in both the number of responses received and the depth of the engagement that was undertaken. The effective partnership working between the Building Communities Together Team, Research and Consultation Team and the Thatcham Neighbourhood Police Team ensured that any feedback was followed up and addressed.

To promote the consultation and ensure that local residents were aware of the proposal the consultation was publicised via press release and Nextdoor. Leaflets were handed out to be displayed in all the key areas within the town centre i.e. Thatcham library, Thatcham town council offices, Kennet Leisure Centre, Kingsland Centre and all shops, restaurants and pubs in the town centre. In addition, articles were also included in the WBC residents' newsletter, and on a number of websites: TVP, Thatcham town Council, Thatcham town cricket club, Kennet Heath Residents Association and Neighbourhood Watch.

A number of key consultees were also identified and were advised of the proposal and consultation. This included Thatcham Town Council and those private landowners within the proposed restricted area (Thatcham Memorial Hall, The Kingsland Centre and St Mary's church).

'Pop Up' events were held to try and engage with people that would not normally complete a WBC survey alongside attending pre-existing groups.

Pop Up Events:

- Thatcham Family Hub was visited on three separate days to ensure a variety of clubs could be attended.
- Kennet Leisure Centre was visited to try and seek the views of young people attending gym sessions and parents taking children to swimming etc.
- Costa Coffee hosted two sessions.

Pre-existing Groups:

- Thatcham Saturday Surgery attended alongside Thatcham town councillors and officers from the Thatcham Neighbourhood police team.
- Thatcham Market.
- Youth Club session run by Berkshire Youth for 13-15yr. olds.
- Youth Club 'Chill & Chat' session by RMD Adventure Learning for 11-16yr. olds.

It was these events that proved to be successful, not only in encouraging people to complete the survey but in addressing specific issues that were raised:-

- Morrisons – an incident occurred at the same time as a session was taking place at Costa Coffee. It transpired that Morrisons were not reporting any incidents of anti-social behaviour to the police. This was raised with neighbourhood policing team who visited the store, spoke to the manager and were able to give appropriate words of advice.
- Betting Shop – a visit to the shop highlighted that staff were facing lots of issues and they felt that nothing was being done. Again the neighbourhood police team were advised and a visit was made.
- Youth Club – a ‘chill and chat’ session was attended on a Friday night to gain the views of the young people. The session was particularly challenging but the leaders of the club were extremely welcoming and stated that it was “the start of a communication collaboration between us on topics relevant to the community.” Advice has also been provided on funding for activities to divert the young people away from causing issues in the community which has been appreciated and the dialogue continues.
- Assistance was provided to help three men in their 30’s who couldn’t read, complete the survey.
- Market traders were very positive and appreciated being asked for their views on issues that weren’t directly about business.
- Costa Coffee felt particularly overwhelmed with some of the issues they have been dealing with and acknowledged that WBC was trying to do something to improve the situation.

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

The consultation received 282 responses.

Question 1: Which of the following statements best describe you? Please tick all that apply.

Figure 1: shows the breakdown of respondents and whether they live, work or visit Thatcham town centre.

| Answer Choices | Responses | |
|--|-----------------|------------|
| I live in the Thatcham town centre area | 31.43% | 88 |
| I live outside the Thatcham town centre area | 59.29% | 166 |
| I work in Thatcham town centre | 5.36% | 15 |
| I am a visitor to Thatcham town centre | 24.64% | 69 |
| I am a Town/Parish Councillor | 0.36% | 1 |
| I am involved in a local community group | 6.43% | 18 |
| I am involved in a local charity | 5.71% | 16 |
| I work for a WBC partner organisation/agency | 3.21% | 9 |
| I own/manage a local business | 1.79% | 5 |
| Other - please specify | 2.86% | 8 |
| Additional information e.g. organisation name (if applicable): | | 22 |
| | Answered | 280 |
| | Skipped | 2 |

Question 2: How much of a problem do you think anti-social behaviour is in Thatcham town centre?

| How much of a problem do you think anti-social behaviour is in Thatcham town centre: | Frequency | Percent |
|--|------------|---------|
| A very big problem | 42 | 15.33% |
| A fairly big problem | 140 | 51.09% |
| Not a very big problem | 61 | 22.26% |
| Not a problem at all | 12 | 4.38% |
| No opinion | 19 | 6.93% |
| Total | 274 | |
| Not answered | 8 | |
| Total | 282 | |

Of the 274 people that responded to this question, 182 (66%) respondents felt anti-social behaviour is 'a very big' or 'fairly big problem' in Thatcham town centre. 73 respondents (26.6%) felt that anti-social behaviour is 'not a very big problem' or 'not a problem at all'.

Comments

This question prompted a lot of comments – 141 in total. The majority stated that they felt there is a problem with anti-social street behaviour in Thatcham town centre. It is worth noting that a number of comments related to the lack of facilities for young people in Thatcham.

Some of the comments received are as follows:

“Young girls and boys harassing shop keepers, they hang out in crowds intimidating visitors and frequent costa in gangs being disruptive and rude whilst not even purchasing anything. They kick bins, swear, drop litter and have become a public nuisance. It can be uncomfortable walking through town past the crowd.”

“It has become a focus for groups of people some of whom are clearly under the influence, who regularly become noisy and aggressive. We always thought this location to be a pleasant one, now we don't go there unless we have business that can be conducted during daylight hours.”

“The combination of a significant number of people, noise levels, foul language and rowdy behaviour is intimidating for families with children and the elderly. This made worse with speeding and often poorly silenced vehicles - motor cycles, scooters and cars treating the Broadway and Church Gate as a race track.”

“I would not feel safe going into the centre in after 8pm due to groups”

“During the day it's fine. In the evening there are groups of young people being noisy, disruptive and on occasion driving around the square at speed. That makes me not want to go to any of the shops/restaurants/takeaways there”

“There is noise, people loitering, the riding of illegal e-scooters, pavement cycling, cycling along the wrong way of one way systems, littering, vandalism. It's absolutely rife.”

Some respondents commented from a different viewpoint and stated the following:

“They're generally quite obsessive about interfering with our ever day lives for no reason”

“I'm not aware of it being any more of an issue than it ever has been”

“Many young children don't have many places to go and socialise making them more antisocial”

“Too many youths missing around with nothing to do”

“I have not seen major issues, sometimes youngsters and noisy when having fun and I do find some older people are intolerant of youngsters.”

“Teens don't have anything to do anymore so loiter and get seen as a nuisance”

“I've lived in Thatcham for 25 years and never had a problem in the town centre”

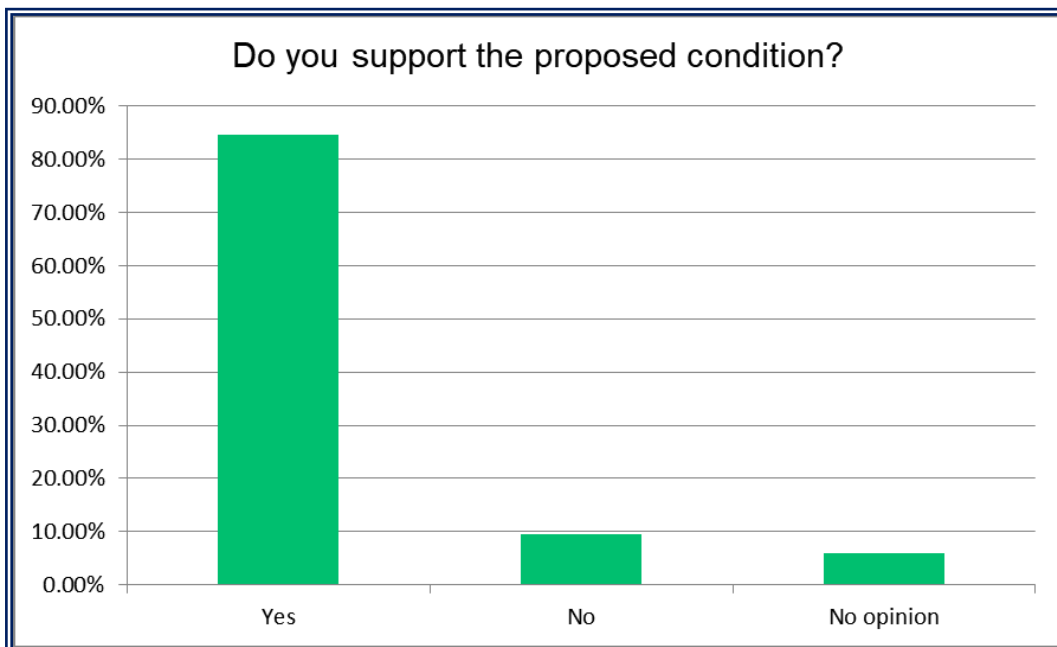
“I rarely witness an issue and when I have its been mostly youngsters letting off steam. I'd rather we offered them a place to meet than penalise them”

**Question 3:
Do you support the proposed condition?**

The consultation proposed restriction to tackle anti-social behaviour in Newbury town centre ‘Any person behaving in a manner that has caused, or is likely to cause, nuisance, harassment, alarm or distress must leave the restricted area when requested to do so by an authorised officer for a specified time, not return to the area for a period not exceeding 24 hours’

A total of 274 respondents answered this question. 232 (84.67%) supported the proposed condition.

| Do you support the proposed condition? | | |
|--|------------|---------|
| | Frequency | Percent |
| Yes | 232 | 84.67% |
| No | 26 | 9.49% |
| No opinion | 16 | 5.84% |
| Total | 274 | |
| Not answered | 8 | |
| Total | 282 | |



Comments

This question generated quite a few comments the majority of which were statements in support of the proposed restriction:

“Need to keep the residents feeling safe.”

“Seems fair and reasonable”

“This would seem reasonable”

“As previous. I would like the town to be somewhere to shop and enjoy, without concerns about being verbally abused, pushed off the pavement or having to avoid areas.”

“All in favour of keeping the town centre a trouble free space”

“Any measures which curb anti-social behaviour are welcomed by me.”

“The measure is an appropriate response enabling the community to deal effectively with this behaviour.”

A number of respondents voiced the following concerns over the proposal:

“too broad of a statement. What is to stop this being applied to a group of people exercising their legal right to peaceful protest?”

“I don't think anything will change”

“It is so petty”

“I don't support this decision because its just going to annoy the young teenagers that live in Thatcham and make them take there so called anti-social behaviour somewhere else outside of the grid”

“I fail to see how ordering people who have committed no offence to leave an area for a day will solve ASB issues. There is also the possibility of people being repeatedly harassed by the police, despite having done nothing wrong”

The Honourable Secretary of Thatcham Bowling Club felt it appropriate to send an email expressing the Club's full support for the proposal adding that ‘the club premises are within the proposed boundary and our members and visitors can be affected by anti-social behaviour when arriving or departing. This proposed development may be beneficial.’

26 respondents did not support the proposal. Further analysis shows that the age of people not supporting the proposal was split as follows:

- nine under 16's years old
- six between 25 - 44yrs. old
- seven between 45 - 64yrs. old
- three between 65 - 74yrs. old
- one from Liberty

A detailed response was received from Liberty and is similar in context to the one received in response to the consultation for the PSPO in Newbury town centre.

The opening paragraph states: *‘The PSPO proposes prohibiting behaviour that West Berkshire Council (‘the Council’) alleges to be ‘anti-social behaviour’. The proposed powers of the PSPO are broad and far-reaching. We are concerned that this language is unreasonably wide and likely to be enforced in a way that targets and criminalises vulnerable individuals and unduly restricts civil liberties. For the reasons set out below, we ask that the Council drop its proposals to introduce these provisions.’*

In response, the proposed PSPO has no restriction to ‘punish poverty-related behaviours such as begging’ nor homelessness. The proposed restrictions are intended to be preventative with the restriction allowing for a police officer to request that behaviour is curtailed before a breach occurs. It is only after someone behaving in a specific manner and asked to leave the restricted area after being asked to do so by a police officer, will the PSPO be breached. The Council has provided evidence as part of the consultation and needs to show that a general behaviour has a negative impact on the community.

The detailed response by Liberty is attached (Appendix C) and legal have been notified.

Question 4:

Do you think this condition should cover the whole of Thatcham town centre, as indicated on the map of proposed restricted area?

A total of 232 respondents answered this question (82%). 50 people did not answer this question.

| Do you think this condition should cover the whole of Thatcham town centre, as indicated on the map of the proposed restricted area? | | |
|--|------------|-------------|
| | Frequency | Percent |
| Yes | 228 | 98.28% |
| No | 4 | 1.72% |
| Total | 232 | 100% |
| Not answered | 50 | |
| Total | 282 | |

Question 5: Please tell us which areas, e.g. wards, road names, or parks/open spaces, you think the condition should cover.

Please tell us which areas, e.g. wards, road names, or parks/open spaces, you think the condition should cover:

| | |
|----------|-----|
| Answered | 4 |
| Skipped | 278 |

Comments

There were only a couple of comments to this question which are as follows:

"Lower way field needs covering there is drug dealing. They take drugs from the park bench seats"

"The Broadway"

"The Broadway the Recreation Ground Bath Road. Kingsway. Maybe it should be flexible to add other roads on a temporary addition to the main order. in if there is a marked anti social behaviour in a particular area. I feel when you start going out of the town centre can push anti social behaviour to parts not covered by the order"

"Alley way starting from the old chequers pub leading down to Kennet heath. We live next to the footpath leading up to the Broadway and we and others get lots of trouble e.g. bangs on doors. Objects throw at doors, windows shouting swearing at residents"

Question 6: Any further comments

This question provided respondents with an opportunity to provide their views on the consultation whether it be in support of the proposed PSPO or to voice concerns.

Do you have any further comments?

| | |
|----------|-----|
| Answered | 121 |
| Skipped | 161 |

A number of people did voice their views.

Comments received in support of the proposed PSPO are as follows:

"I am glad that this is happening as we all would like to live in a safe environment."

"It's a real problem"

"I think we should do this to stop bad behaviour around Thatcham"

“This has long been a problem - see the many responses gathered from residents during both iterations of the Thatcham Vision. These concerns were never addressed and have been allowed to escalate - condoned through inaction.”

“Quite lot of people feel unsafe especially at night-time”

Comments received voicing concerns over the proposal are as follows:

Quite a number of respondents also commented on the need for activities in Thatcham.

“I don't agree with it, it is a stupid idea it doesn't make sense we are kids trying to live our lives”

“I don't think this is the solution”

“We need to have more activities for the local you to be able to access”

“Instead of just giving them the order can we let them know about the various youth groups that are on or let them know where they can meet up in smaller groups. Education and outreach are the first steps. I understand many of them may not wish to be at home so if they understand they can meet socially in smaller groups and utilise the other facilities in the town”

“This is an unjust response to an issue that hardly exists. If this is in response to youth in the area, rather than enforcing this, provide them with alternative activities”

“Invest more into the causes of the anti-social behaviour I.e. lack of facilities, lack of police presence. It is worth noting that what is a nuisance to one person is not to another.”

“Invest in safe places for youngsters to meet each other and youth workers instead of criminalising them.”

Question 7. How did you first hear about this consultation?

| | Frequency | Percent |
|---|------------|---------|
| Local newspaper, TV or Radio | 21 | 7.72% |
| Email or letter from a WBC officer | 19 | 6.99% |
| Email notification sent to members of WBC Community Panel | 19 | 6.99% |
| WBC social media account e.g. Facebook or twitter | 45 | 16.54% |
| WBC Consultation and Engagement Hub | 10 | 3.68% |
| WBC e-Newsletter | 14 | 5.15% |
| Word of mouth | 46 | 16.91% |
| Poster or leaflet | 4 | 1.47% |
| 'Pop up' Event | 47 | 17.28% |
| Other | 47 | 17.28% |
| Answered | 272 | |
| Skipped | 10 | |

It is interesting to note that the ‘pop up’ events proved to be extremely beneficial in promoting the consultation proving that having someone in person ‘on the ground’ attending events and locations does get people engaged.

The final section of the consultation were questions about the respondents.

Question 8: What is your gender?

95.74% of respondents answered this question (270 out of 282). Of those that did answer the question, 58.89% were female and 39.6% male with 1.48% answering ‘other’.

| What is your gender? | Frequency | Percent |
|----------------------|------------|---------------|
| Male | 107 | 39.63% |
| Female | 159 | 58.89% |
| Other | 4 | 1.48% |
| Total | 270 | 95.74% |
| Not answered | 12 | |
| Total | 282 | |

Question 9: How old are you?

95.74% answered this question (270 out of 282). 12 respondents did not answer the question.

Of those that did answer the question, the majority of respondents were aged between 35-64 which accounted for 157 or 58% of respondents.

It is positive to see that 29 under 19s responded to the survey and 39 under 25s – this accounted for 14% of respondents.

| How old are you? | Frequency | Percent |
|------------------|-----------|---------|
| Under 16 | 23 | 8.52% |
| 16-17 | 6 | 2.22% |
| 18-24 | 10 | 3.7% |
| 25-34 | 29 | 10.74% |
| 35-44 | 47 | 17.41% |
| 45-54 | 64 | 23.7% |
| 55-64 | 46 | 17.04% |
| 65-74 | 36 | 13.33% |
| 75 and over | 9 | 3.33% |

| | | |
|---------------------|------------|--|
| Total | 270 | |
| Not answered | 12 | |
| Total | 282 | |

Question 10: I consent to the council collecting and processing special category data according to the purposed outlined in its privacy notice.

11 respondents did not answer this question.

| | Frequency | Percent |
|-----------------|------------------|----------------|
| Yes | 240 | 88.56% |
| No | 31 | 11.44% |
| Answered | 271 | |
| Skipped | 11 | |

Question 11: Do you have a disability, long-term illness or health condition?

Of the 237 respondents that answered this question, 202 did not have a disability, long-term illness or health condition (85.23%), 35 people answered ‘yes’, 14.77% of the people that answered the question.

| Do you consider yourself to have a disability, long-term illness or health condition? | Frequency | Percent |
|--|------------------|----------------|
| Yes | 35 | 14.77% |
| No | 202 | 85.23% |
| If you’ve answered yes, and feel the nature of what we’re proposing/considering would have an impact on you because of your disability, illness or condition, please clarify what the disability is in the space below. | 15 | |
| Answered | 237 | |
| Not answered | 45 | |
| Total | 282 | |

Question 12: What is your ethnic group? Categories are based on those asked at the census 2021

| What is your ethnic group? | | |
|---|------------|---------|
| Answer choices | Frequency | Percent |
| White English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British | 208 | 88.51% |
| White Irish | 2 | 0.85% |
| White other | 13 | 5.53% |
| Gypsy, Irish traveller or Roma | 0 | 0% |
| Mixed or multiple ethnic groups | 4 | 1.7% |
| Asian or Asian British | 1 | 0.43% |
| Black, Black British, Caribbean or African | 2 | 0.85% |
| Other ethnic group – please specify | 5 | 2.13% |
| Answered | 235 | |
| Not answered | 47 | |
| Total | 282 | |

Question 12: Would you like to join West Berkshire Council’s Community Panel?

If you’re a resident of West Berkshire, and would like to be invited to participate in any of our future consultation or engagement exercises, you can apply to join our Community Panel.

| Would you like to join West Berkshire Council’s Community Panel? | | |
|--|------------|---------|
| Answer choices | Frequency | Percent |
| Yes | 51 | 19.32% |
| No | 183 | 69.32% |
| Already a member | 30 | 11.36% |
| Answered | 264 | |
| Not answered | 18 | |
| Total | 282 | |

HOW WE HAVE USED THE RESULTS OF THE CONSULTATION

We would like to thank everyone that responded to this consultation.

The results of the consultation show that a PSPO would be supported by those living, working and visiting Thatcham and will help inform the decision on whether or not West Berkshire Council applies for a PSPO for Thatcham town centre.

It is proposed that the consultation document is circulated to the West Berkshire Building Communities Together Partnership for comment and for a decision to be made on the next steps. The outcome will be published on the council's website shortly after.