

From: [REDACTED]
To: [PlanningPolicy](#)
Subject: WBC LPR Regulation 19 Objection
Date: 03 March 2023 15:43:31

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Dear West Berkshire Council Planning Committee,

Please find below my concerns and objection to the Regulation 19 consultation regarding the proposed development in North East Thatcham. Whilst I appreciate the need to invest in new housing, there are various elements to the plan that are clearly unsound and have not been properly considered nor the risks mitigated. This will undoubtedly lead to negative consequences for both existing and any new residents to the area not to mention the local infrastructure and environment.

Traffic and Transport:

Firstly, regarding transport and traffic. This area already struggles with traffic issues. We are on a main through route from Newbury to the motorway junction at Theale, and the A4 is already stretched by the current traffic, with rural routes through Upper Bucklebury and surrounding small villages taking some of this strain. The addition of up to 2500 additional houses at the NE Thatcham site, specifically the proposed north exit onto Harts Hill road will vastly increase this road traffic with the risk of accidents, pedestrian injuries and wildlife collisions all increasing exponentially. There are already problems with speeding and road maintenance (significant potholes regularly causing damage to vehicles) through these small villages, and the increased traffic burden will only make this worse. Villages such as Upper Bucklebury, Bradfield Southend and Cold Ash all have schools/community centres located on these main through routes, some of which have little/no pavements, which raises significant concerns about the safety of pedestrians as well as the air quality risks. There are also risks to car users on these rural routes, in the form of large wildlife (Deer, Muntjac, Badgers) in plentiful numbers in the woodland surrounding our villages. These do significant damage to a car and its occupants when hit at speed.

The plans also propose a new car park on Harts Hill Road. This road is already a high-risk area for accidents, with significant ice issues over winter and year-round large potholes, any additional traffic will worsen this risk to new and existing residents alike. Furthermore there are issues with antisocial behaviour in the carparks located on the common, loud music playing, recreational drug abuse etc and further carparking is likely to worsen this.

I note the comments that you feel the development will 'increase the opportunities for walking, cycling and use of public transport'. **I dispute this.** As a confident cyclist I already chose not to cycle down Harts Hill road due to the risks outlined above. An increase in road traffic through the other roads in the village will only decrease the safety of cyclists. Furthermore the proposed development will obstruct (even if only for the duration of the building work) a **beautiful and safe** walking route from Upper Bucklebury into Thatcham via Colthrop farm that I regularly use to access Thatcham Station. This will force further road use rather than reducing it. The plans mention improving public transport, we currently have one bus route that passes through the village 3 times a day with very limited stops. As a result the usage is low as it is impractical. By whom and how will this 'improvement' be funded? What will this mean for residents? This information has not been provided and vague statements cannot be accepted as evidence of risk mitigation. The roads in these small villages are simply not suitable for large vehicles and keeping

the roads quieter and safer for cyclists/pedestrians in the way that our 'Bucklebury quiet lanes' currently are, has got to be a priority for encouraging sustainable travel.

Infrastructure:

Secondly, considering healthcare provision for new residents; whilst the plan proposes a primary care facility will be included in the building works there is no evidence that any strategic healthcare planning has been considered. As a Doctor working in the NHS I am all too aware of the shortages in staffing and funding of healthcare, and is incredibly rare for NHS England to create a brand new healthcare facility without the amalgamation/extension/expansion of existing practices. Any expansion or relocation of existing services would have an impact on the existing patients. Whilst large 'Super Practices' are perhaps suitable in towns/cities, in our rural setting this would inevitably lead to worsening health inequality as those who need it most are unable to access healthcare due to physical distance and poor public transport. The surgery at Chapel Row is already stretched, covering a large number of patients whose health and wellbeing cannot be compromised by the addition of 2500 new homes without adequate healthcare to support. Neither can we expect our already overstretched GP colleagues to simply 'cope' with these thousands of new patients, many of whom will likely be young families requiring maternity care, childhood vaccinations etc. There is no evidence that local practices have been consulted or considered in these plans. This development simply cannot go ahead without the **guarantee of an adequately sized and staffed** healthcare facility due to the unacceptable risks to existing residents, new residents and the current healthcare staff.

I have similar concerns regarding the provision for educational facilities/spaces for this new development. The planning proposal states the these things 'will be provided' but gives no detail on how, where, when and funded by whom. This applies to both nursery/early years places and primary/secondary school places. The document states that £12million will be provided for primary education, however this appears to be based on data modelling from 2011 and again doesn't provide any details on when, where and how this educational requirement will be met. Regarding secondary education, the development plan states that the size of the NE Thatcham development is insufficient to justify creating a new secondary school as it does not meet the size requirement set out by the government that schools need to be a certain size to provide adequate facilities/sustainability. This will result in the existing schools needing to take on new pupils. It is not uncommon for schools to be oversubscribed, leading to families with children in different schools, having to travel out of area for schooling or even move to facilitate schooling. Again no detail has been provided as to how the existing secondary schools will be able to cope with the additional students. No evidence of any consultation with schools as to whether expansion is possible at their location, nor whether staffing will be adequate to allow for these additional students.

Educational provision needs to be robustly planned and established before any building work could take place as residents will require school places immediately on moving in. Therefore I have significant concerns that this planning is inadequate in this regard, and simply stating that these services 'will be provided' is insufficient.

Environment/wildlife:

The importance of living sustainably and minimising our impact as a species on the environment has never been more pressing. As we emerge from the shadow of a worldwide pandemic and are hit by increasingly common extreme weather events, it is essential that all future developments and human activity must be done sensitively and in an environmentally sound

way.

The building of 2500 homes on what is currently an area of farmland and ancient woodlands will result in around 4000 additional people being concentrated on the area. This increase in human burden, especially as the plans state the intent to encourage links from the new development to the wider AONB via this area 'accessible to all users' (ie including road traffic) completely contradicts the current management vision which aims to protect the fragile ecosystem that exists on Bucklebury common. The threat that this puts on legally protected wildlife, ancient woodlands and the beautiful spaces that are currently available for recreation is undeniable. The Parish currently work so hard to protect, nurture and restore these areas of biodiversity, resulting in a haven for wildlife. This will be extinguished should this development go ahead, turning a unique and rural village into a suburb of a growing sprawl of Thatcham.

The plans do not show how adequate green and biodiverse spaces will be incorporated into the site itself therefore it is unavoidable that any new residents would choose to visit and enjoy the common and area surrounding the site. It is clear that WBC does not value the biodiversity of the area as the original proposal for two 'country parks' in the initial Thatcham growth plan has now been downgraded into a vague 'community park' with no clear evidence that the legally protected wildlife within the area will be adequately conserved. There are unsubstantiated statements that risks would be mitigated, but the LPR's own sustainability appraisal states that it will have a negative impact on sustainability simply due to it being a greenfield site! This does not consider all the other negative impacts an additional 4000 people would have on the local ecology.

There is **no evidence** in these plans that the development will benefit the environment, with **clear evidence** that simply by being a greenfield site would result in a negative impact on environmental sustainability.

Please accept this letter as my strong objection to the NE Thatcham development on the grounds that the impact of 2500 new homes on the local infrastructure (particularly **healthcare** and **education**) and the **environment** (both ecological and quality of life for existing and new residents) has **simply not been adequately considered nor risks mitigated**. The size of this development is completely disproportionate to locality and will have only negative impacts on the local community and area.

Yours sincerely,
Dr Rebecca Atkins

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