

2nd March 2023

Mrs J Barlow



THATCHAM NE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Dear Sirs

I am **OBJECTING** to the Thatcham NE Housing Development Plan for the following reasons;

The information provided by the council regarding this development is in the form of a lengthy document which is not very accessible to the public. Thankfully, our Parish Council has waded through a considerable amount of pages to help us understand the implications on the local area of building this development.

From the work undertaken by Bucklebury Parish Council on residents' behalf it is evident that the information provided 'for' the development in the Local Plan is vague using out-dated information ie the data used regarding the biodiversity of Bucklebury Common is provided from surveys of which 80% of surveys were conducted more than 15 years ago, 50% 20 years ago and 44% 30 years ago.

Another example is that of the proposed 450 sq m primary healthcare facility with the suggestion that a GP Surgery be offered to the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board or other such appropriate body. However, the Local Plan Review provides no specific detail or insight into strategic healthcare planning.

I live in [REDACTED] and want to let you know how this development will affect local residents. Initially, I didn't think we would be impacted greatly as I had assumed the traffic would be directed towards the A4 or along the bypass towards Newbury. However, this is not the case and after reading the information provided it will have a significant affect on the lives of all residents in Bucklebury, Chapel Row, Midgham, Cold Ash, Bradfield and Beenham and the natural environment.

Greenfield Site

My main objection is that this is a greenfield site. New research from the CPRE says in rural West Berkshire, there are around 53 brownfield sites totalling 46.54 hectares, which it is claimed would allow building of 2,837 new homes without the need to build on any farmland or countryside at all.

When the housing numbers are no longer mandatory, and when there is already considerable potential for new homes to be built on brownfield sites, it is clearly wrong for local councils in our county to be offering up vast swathes of countryside to developers, especially Green Belt land and protected landscapes such as AONB [Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty],” said Greg Wilkinson, chairman of CPRE Berkshire.

The site of a former paper mill and farm in Colthrop has been proposed by developers as an alternative housing strategy for Thatcham and the overwhelming response from the public was very positive. A new road bridge over the railway and improved infrastructure would help ease traffic considerably.

The railway level crossing at Thatcham Station causes huge queues of traffic either side of the railway backing up towards the A4 and Greenham. With the increased traffic created by the development, the queues will just be longer, especially during the rush hour. This in turn will cause increased levels of pollution from exhausts and tyres.

Traffic Increase

As mentioned above one of the main objections is the increase in traffic movements as a result of the new development.

Two access roads from the estate, one leading directly on to Harts Hill Road, will mean a huge amount of additional traffic will travel through the villages of Bucklebury, Chapel Row and Bradfield to get to the main road giving access to A4 (Reading), M4 (east and west bound).

As well as taking this direct route, traffic will use smaller lanes from this road down to the A4, travelling south towards Basingstoke/Hungerford and up through Cold Ash to travel north. The roads are narrow country lanes with many bends and no footpaths. The condition of these roads is poor to say the least, with many potholes as water running/settling along the edge of the roads freezes and then causes the tarmac to break up.

The villages are very quiet with little through traffic. The main route from Harts Hill Road consists of several acute bends and like the majority of this route, there are no pavements. Increased traffic will cause accidents with pedestrians, cyclists and horses. There are many equestrian properties in this area and sadly, even with the current level of traffic several accidents involving cars and horses occur.

Directing traffic along this road will only add to pressure on existing accident blackspots. I.e where Common Hill meets the A340 (road to Tidmarsh) and the junction of Back Lane and dual carriageway of A4.

There is no alternative to car travel. The regular but infrequent buses through the villages, having been totally stopped about five years ago. In this area, if you need to get somewhere you need a car. Very few people living in these areas use other alternatives to the car.

GP Surgery

Our local GP surgery in Chapel Row is already struggling to recruit and retain staff, combined with the increased population in the area with infilling of new houses. It is impossible to get an appointment unless you phone in the morning and if you are lucky enough to get through you might be able to see a GP. If the surgery is forced to accept more patients it will negatively affect the existing patients and cause further pressure on Newbury Minor Injuries (Thatcham) and A&E.

Bucklebury Common

The plan mentions a 'Country Park' – this has a specific accepted definition which is not met in this Plan. The three small, isolated areas inside the proposed settlement boundary have no meaningful environmental value or commitment to exclude subsequent development. The development should provide adequate green space within the development itself and not rely on a link to the area of AONB to provide its quota of green space.

Bucklebury Common should be protected from increased footfall which will have an adverse effect upon the Common and its wildlife. It has a very diverse ecosystem that is nationally important. This

consists of the famous Avenue of Oaks at Chapel Row, ancient woodland at Holly Wood and one of the largest areas of heathland in Berkshire.

The Common has a rich variety of flora and fauna. Conservation of important habitats is undertaken by the Estate through direct management and in collaboration with various voluntary organisations. The Bucklebury Heathland Group continues to work to restore the Common Heathland which was once an extensive of heather and gorse, offering sanctuary to many birds and much wildlife.

Already there are problems with anti-social behaviour such as groups of motorbike riders on the Common and 'doggers' at night meeting in the carparks along the Common.

The local environment will be changed forever in a negative way. This is Greenfield development abutting an AONB with no up-to-date evidence nor strategy for positive impact and overall biodiversity gain.

I strongly urge you to reject this development and look at alternative sites that will not destroy this beautiful area for future generations.

Yours faithfully

Julia Barlow

