

02 MAR 2023

**For the attention of West Berks Council, Town Councils of Newbury & Thatcham (Councilors, Council Engineers & Planners, residents & prospective developers).**

**This document is a response to local Councils' public consultation for proposed revisions & re-assessments to previous local future development plans in 2017 & 2018 (VISIONS 2026, & 2019 – 2036).**

**Cc to Laura Farris MP for information.**

**NOTE: Updated response dated 27<sup>th</sup>, February 2023**

**Introduction:-**

Many of my observations were outlined in my previous submissions (2017 & 2018), & are repeated as still being relevant, as regrettably, I am unaware of any long-term actions or visionary planning since then to date.

The main issues to be resolved are :-

- Traffic Management / Highway Infrastructure.
- Housing.
- Drainage Infrastructures
- Education & Sport.
- Redevelopment Newbury Town Centre (Kennet Centre).
- Private Estate roads & drainage infrastructures.
- Final Conclusions

Keith Hoddinott,

23<sup>rd</sup>. November 2022

27<sup>th</sup>. February 2023

***P.S. I apologise that many of my comments are those I have expressed before, but I feel they are worth re-stating in this public consultation period on the "Future of the Newbury / Thatcham " conurbation.***

***If any Council, members or officers wish to discuss any of the topics raised, I am always willing to meet.***

WEST BERKSHIRE  
COUNCIL

**Traffic Management / Highway Infrastructure.**

Unless some strategic long-term vision is not addressed, ***the FUTURE VISION for Newbury will be 24/7 traffic gridlock, & estates of densely packed properties with no space for parking & environmental park areas;*** & Newbury will die as a vibrant commercial & business centre.

Already business & commercial buildings are being converted into housing, & concern is being expressed that Newbury will become a satellite town.

Perhaps businesses are already experiencing the onset of continual traffic congestion problems, & staff not being able to afford housing.

Housing (both locally & nationally) is urgently needed, however all the planned developments & probable areas for planning permission are all located along the A339 corridor through Newbury, which will inevitably lead to more traffic congestion.

I do not see any long term strategy or vision regarding the highway infrastructure from anyone to plan the consequences of such developments. Where are the individuals with any sense of lateral thinking, or are their voices being stifled by political & bureaucratic procedures. Is this the legacy that the MP/Dept. of Transport, Councils and officers (& developers) wish to be remembered by!!!

ALL developments are being channeled onto the already overstretched only river/rail crossing, the A339.

New & future developments at:-

1. Market Street
2. Newbury Racecourse
3. Sandleford
4. Sterling Cables site
5. sites in Mill Lane (eg. Magistrates court / police station)
6. Faraday Road
7. part housing redevelopment of Business parks
8. inevitably the Royal Mail site in Bear Lane.
9. developments north of Love Lane (A339 & Vodafone sites)
10. Greenham developments.
11. Proposed development NE Thatcham.

It would appear than there is no long-term planning/vision as to where all this extra traffic will go. The recent proposals are only "tinkering at the edges", & will certainly not be effective in 13 years time in 2036.

All the time, small developments are potentially blocking a possible eastern bypass - is this a hidden agenda strategy by the Council, or lack of foresight.

***I would respectfully suggest that URGENT thought be given at this time to start formulating a long term traffic management vision by starting with the Sandleford development, by insisting that the various developers and the Council, with central Government legislative & financial support, plan a dual carriageway link between the A339 roundabout at Newtown, along the northern side of the River Enborne, to link with the A343, with an improved access onto the A34. Co-ordinating with future DoT upgrading plans for the A34.***

On the eastern side of the Newbury/Thatcham conurbation, the bypass route be from Vodafone, north of Thatcham, Pipers Way, a new bridge over rail and river (as suggested in the NWN in October 2015 (!!!!), through to Thornford road. The dangerous junction of Burys Bank Rd. out onto the hill, could be eliminated by a new link road across Crookham Common from near Partridge Gully, south of south of Thornford Park establishment, & then onto the old Thornford Rd at the top of the hill.

I am not suggesting that this be done all at once, but the vision could be planned & implemented piecemeal as and when the opportunity arises with development applications.

Further to my e-mail to you appertaining to "Highway Infrastructure VISION" & the Sandford development, dated 25<sup>th</sup> November 2016, I note the Town Council has asked for observations on the future of the Town, and vision for the future. I therefore set out some observations regarding "parking standards on housing developments", and housing in general.

The recent accident & road closure on the A34 south of the A339 connection (off junction 13 M4) demonstrated the vulnerability of the A339 through Newbury with the inevitable several hours of gridlock which ensued.

Also, I have noticed the tail backs of vehicles on the Western Avenue as far back as the "Starting Gate" PH on a regular basis.

**The proximity of the Fire & Ambulance to this junction & the high traffic flows will have an increasing effect on time responses.**

**It is important, in tandem with adoption of drainage infrastructures (see page 6), that highways are adopted on new developments. This facilitates Water Co's adoption procedures. These requirements should be a planning condition from outline stage, & carried forward with the appropriate legal agreements.**

#### PARKING REQUIREMENTS

When planning officers and councillors recognise the obvious fact that residents want and need cars, in towns such as the size of Newbury, public transport cannot be a comprehensive and frequent as in a large city to support a comprehensive frequent public transport system whereby commuters can expect a bus every 10 minutes (as in large cities such as London) in parts of Newbury even a 30 minute service would be appreciated.

The standard of 1.25 cars per household is totally unrealistic. It is ironic that in estates built in the 1950's (such as Chestnut Crescent), when house holders probably had few cars, there is now plenty of space for off street parking (in most cases 2 or more) and that most properties actually have 3 or more vehicles. Contrast this with some modern estates, where the density is so intense & parking spaces limited to 2 or less, that parking has to be on the pavement and makes driving through hazardous. Of course, developers accede to these requirements as they can increase the density of units. The social climate at the moment means that the majority of households need 2 or 3 cars. Even those who believe no longer this will



## Housing

Councils do not appear to be singing to the same "hymn sheet" as the Government. Housing is clearly the answer to many issues beyond the simple need of "roofs over heads" - financing social needs being one example (high rents for low income & homeless. Are high rents discouraging lower paid care workers into the area to fill job vacancies?).

One area where I believe housing could be undertaken is west of the end of Craven Road, south of the canal, and adjoining Enborne Road unto the A34, with a new access onto the A34 - once again coordinated with any future improvements to the A34, which have recently been advocated with public and local MP support, and maybe in the Chancellor's INFRASTRUCTURE budget recently announced. This access would give another exit/entry for the town south of the river.

I believe that unless a far-reaching vision is not formulated to prevent the strangulation of the movement within the conurbation, Newbury will face a permanent gridlock.

The provision of housing is a major issue, and local opinion can be a major factor in resisting proposed development. However, it is clear that more housing is required if Newbury is to continue to prosper. The advent of the electrification of the train service to London will only increase the demand on the limited supply, which will inevitably increase prices unless the supply is increased. Un-fortunately it is inevitable that cherished open green field sites will have to be developed, but the densities should be low. **Clearly in a small country such as the UK, horizontal space is at a premium. Therefore, there should be some vision to think vertically, such as more 3 floor properties, and the consideration of basements & underground parking. Within the boundaries of the town, there are plenty of examples of this style of building from previous generations.**

**Houses should be adaptable to be extended (incl. use of roof space) at a later date to accommodate, say an elderly relative, live-in carers, sons/daughters living at home, but working/studying.**

### PARKING REQUIREMENTS

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**The standard of 1.25 cars per household is totally unrealistic.** It is ironic that on estates built in the 1950's (such as Chestnut Crescent), when house holders probably had few cars, there is now plenty of space for off street parking (in most cases 3 or more), and that most properties actually have 3 or more vehicles. Contrast this with some modern estates, where the density is so intense & parking spaces limited to 2 or less, that parking has to be on the pavements and makes driving through hazardous. Of course, developers accede to these requirements, as they can increase the density of units. The social climate at the moment means that the majority of households need 2 or 3 cars. Even those who perhaps no longer drive will

have visitors & social carers. The cost of acquiring a house/apartment/flat has meant that more households are multi-generational.

It would be interesting to know how many officers, councilors, & developers have 2 or more vehicles!!

With the high cost of housing, homes are becoming multi-generational, & several parking spaces are required (given the preponderance of vans etc. used by individuals working from home). The standards set are totally inadequate for current (& for-seeable) lifestyles, but eagerly accepted by developers as they can achieve higher densities of properties. It is disappointing that the proposals at Market Street did not encompass more underground parking. *( I did suggest this during the consultation meetings organized by the developers).*

. In a country short of horizontal space, architects & engineers should think vertically to make the most efficient use of the horizontal area of the proposed development. I raise strong objections to the access via Warren Road, as this is unsuitable due to the exit from the school - imagine morning traffic with the school run combined with commuters from the development – a lethal accident waiting to happen involving school children!!!.

The proposed approx. 2,000 houses east of Thatcham & north of the A4 up to Bucklebury, not only raise local highway & environmental issues; but due to the topography pose particular flood risk & the requirement for extra capacity in sewers downstream & at the sewage treatment works in Lower Way. Development should be considered premature, & hence refused, until the capacity of the sewers & treatment works have been upgraded to accommodate the additional flows. This should prevent sewage spills during dry weather conditions.

The proposed site south of the Thatcham Rail Station has some advantages. This is a brown field site with some potential toxic waste. Therefore, removal of this waste would eliminate the risk of leachate into the river/canal. The developer has proposed a bridge over the rail/river, which would address the general traffic flow problems. The site is adjacent to good rail links.

## **Drainage Infrastructures**

### **Schedules (Sections) 3 (SUDS) & 42 (Sewers), Flood & Water Management Act 2010.**

You will be aware from past correspondence of my efforts to get the Government to implement the above legislation. I have now exhausted all the direct contact with departments, agencies & organisations to pressure DEFRA to **ABIDE** by Government original intentions, & the Parliamentary Scrutiny Cttee's recommendations (2017), & the Food & Rural Affairs Cttee. (HC170 – Sept. 2020) conclusions; & show some **"Duty of Care"** to home owners. The LGA will not accept my representations as an individual, but only from one of its local authority members.

Therefore, I am formally requesting that West Berks Council makes representations to the LGA to pressure Government to implement this legislation immediately. This will enable the mandatory adoption of SUDS & Sewers, & close the loophole in planning procedures, which large developers are using to the legal, financial & environmental detriment of homeowners. Bracknell-Forest Council have gone some way in their policy towards SUDS provisions on new developments. Therefore why can not WBC do likewise. G.Eaton (Dept.for Levelling-up, Hsg. &Communities) has said in correspondence that LA's & Water Co.'s should be more robust at the early planning stages to require infrastructures to be adopted.

This is not only a serious National issue, but of particular concern to the Thatcham Flood Forum. They are concerned that unregulated design, construction & future maintenance of private SUDS & sewer infrastructures on proposed developments north of the town on the rising escarpments up to Cold Ash & Bucklebury **could in the future compromise & prejudice the integrity of the recent Flood Alleviation schemes being undertaken by WBC.**

I have spoken informally to some Thatcham & Newbury Town Councillors, who are sympathetic to the implementation of this legislation.

There are many nuances & unintended legal, financial & environmental consequences to the delays in the Government's inaction on these issues, which have been outlined in previous correspondence. Therefore, I would be willing to discuss these issues with yourself & members.

**Recent correspondence from the Dept. for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities suggest that Councils should be expected to be more robust in their policies for the provision of infrastructures including flood risk management & sewerage infrastructures.**

**An opportunity of the SUDS infrastructures is that they could be used as an integrated part of open space areas, developed to provide planting & biodiversity. Hence the need for such areas to be adopted & maintained by the Council.**



## **Education & Sport**

Undoubtedly, there will be financial strains on public expenditure, & it is, therefore, very important that sport & exercise should be prominent & not sidelined in schools. Over many decades successive governments & authorities have reduced time for sport & disposed of playing fields. If the government is serious about reversing the unhealthy trend, then the time has come to make "Sport & Nutrition" a significant & important part of school life & education.

As chair of Newbury Junior Netball, I ask members, parents & teachers to keep their "eyes & ears" awake to any changes to sports facilities at schools to ensure that sports facilities are enhanced & not diminished, particularly in respect of Park House & the planned Sandleford development.

There are, today, so many professional opportunities in sport, not only Netball but in the increasing high profile womens' football, rugby & cricket sports, whether it be, as a player, coach, umpire, administrator, or media commentator. Many of the skills coached in one sport are often transferrable to other team ball games.

Sport teaches us discipline, respect for rules etc, team spirit, how to react to disappointment. It sets us up for life to partake in sport & so keep healthy.

As new developments come forward, demands will be made for land for schools. Developers may contrive to reduce the area required, at the expense of sports facilities.

Facilities for amateur sport to hire from schools is already limited, & the dispute over the LRIE football provision has not improved the situation.

**Has WBC instigated an appraisal (researching past contract specification documents) of whether any school (& other public buildings) are likely to be affected by the recent event of a school collapsing due to defective reinforced concrete.**

## **Newbury Town Centre**

Design should be innovative to encompass greater footfall along streets, with planning requirements to have many more small shops, offices, & small businesses at ground level under apartments etc., with ample car parking (& for emergency services & deliveries) at ground or underground levels.

**The developer's proposals are too high & dwarf the ancient (presumably listed buildings) church & town hall. Any new developments should be no higher than the base of the clock tower on the town hall.**

### **Private Estate roads & drainage infrastructures (trends by developers).**

I note the trend towards private (un-adopted roads) streets (Racecourse development, & the Taylor/Wimpey site adjacent to Vodafone Centre).

Clearly the developers are content with this, as they can build to a lower standard of design and construction. However, what happens in the future when the roads have deteriorated, and the "management" arrangement has financially collapsed. The cost will fall on unsuspecting house owners, who may say "why didn't the Council ensure adoption when the houses were constructed".

Land prices should reflect the infrastructure requirements and recovery (ex. industrial sites) costs.

I suspect that some developers are manipulating land prices, in order to avoid the infrastructure & social/affordable housing requirements of the Council.

Brown field sites are not necessarily more expensive to build on. Land hoarding by developers should be curtailed by measures to encourage swift starts once planning permission is granted. Failure to do so should be legislated so that Council's can say, purchase from the developer at the price he paid before planning permission granted. Why not allow Councils to purchase land. Mrs. Thatcher sold Council Houses, and it is perhaps ironical that home ownership is now lower than at her time. One reason being that replacement of Council Houses was not permitted. Then Councils were "persuaded" to sell estates to newly formed Housing Associations. Her hidden agenda (as with selling off the public utilities) was to reduce the PSBR government loans. So why is the Conservative Government now proposing to bring Housing Association loans within the PSBR?

Harold Macmillan, who as Housing Minister was responsible for building 300,000 houses per year, still a record. I am afraid the effect of Thatcher's policy of selling Council Houses without building replacements is coming home to roost.

### **Final Conclusions**

**Central Government should return some stronger planning powers & financial measures to Local Authorities, in order to facilitate the targets for new housing, particularly social (council) housing, which they wish to achieve**

The recent confusion & apparent lack of control over the developments adjacent to the A339 & Vodafone complex only highlights the need for robust implementation of existing legislation, but also to reinforce LA control through the enactment of Schedules 3 & 42 of the 2010 Water & Flood Management Act.