

26th Feb 2023

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re WBC LPR Regulation 19 Objection – SP17

With reference to the above, I am writing to strongly object to the proposed development as I find it fundamentally unsound.

On 6.12.22, Michael Gove (Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) released a Written Ministerial Statement detailing that the Standard Method for calculating the housing requirement for a local authority (and which has been used by West Berkshire for the regulation 19 version of the plan), should now be an advisory starting point and not mandatory. The resulting ongoing consultation has a focus to consider the character of an area when assessing how much housing can be accommodated. Unlike a number of other Local Authorities, West Berkshire has not taken the opportunity to pause the plan making to await the outcome of the consultation with its updated planning guidance.

The land north of Floral Way has maintained the gap between Thatcham and Bucklebury thus ensuring a rural environment essential to the community's overall wellbeing. The proposal all but eliminates the separation and will visually and socially break natural community boundaries. This contravenes well established planning norms which have been consistently applied in the recent past. It is incomprehensible that its loss is now proposed.

The proposed development abuts Bucklebury Common and the North Wessex Downs AONB. This development will have a lasting and negative impact on these special environs. Bucklebury Common is protected because of its flora, fauna and its situation. It contains remnants of ancient and fragile habitats that are known to be home to legally protected wildlife. The plants in and bounding the AONB will suffer and the Common will be put under pressure from additional visitors. The AONB is already witnessing habitat damage from walkers, cyclists and motorised vehicles, which will inevitably increase with the proposed development adjacent to it.

There is no evidence in the background documentation provided by West Berkshire Council to support claims that SP17 will have a positive impact on the environment. In fact, it is much more likely that it will have a significantly negative impact. The plan's own Sustainability Appraisal states that SP17 will have a negative impact on environmental sustainability - 'The site is a greenfield site and therefore, would result in a negative impact on environmental sustainability which would be mitigated.' Nowhere in the plan is any detail given on what those mitigation measures would involve, only a vague reference to undefined 'community parks'. In addition, the plan states its intent to provide a green infrastructure network to 'take advantage of the landscape' and to 'facilitate connection to the AONB', which will inevitably lead to increasing human pressure on the fragile ecosystems.

In addition, the proposed development on a sloping site with associated runoff from concrete and tarmacadamed paving and road surfaces will inevitably contribute to a greater risk of potential future flooding events along the river valley (A4/Bath Road and Thatcham).

Overall, the focus of the SP17 policy is to build as many houses as possible in a small area of the countryside, with insufficient detail/evidence to investigate, analyse and systematically address any potential consequences.

Yours faithfully,

Mrs Carol Newby

A large black rectangular redaction box covers the signature and contact information of Mrs Carol Newby. The redaction consists of several overlapping black shapes that completely obscure any text or graphics that might have been present.