

CAMPAIGN TO PROTECT RURAL ENGLAND

BERKSHIRE BRANCH

SUBMISSION IN RESPONSE TO DRAFT WEST BERKSHIRE LOCAL PLAN REVIEW 2022-2039

Regulation 19

MARCH 2023

CPRE Berkshire has over 400 members and supporters

Introduction: The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE, the countryside charity), Berkshire Branch welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Draft West Berkshire Local Plan. We would like to express our appreciation of the documentation that has been provided, in particular the clarity and accessibility of the supporting information.

CPRE concerns:

1. We remain concerned however about the introduction of further housing some of the land allocations and would the Council to provide more evidence concerning air quality impact both on the new areas for development and on nearby areas of important landscape and wildlife interest.
2. The main purpose of this response however is to express our great concern regarding the appearance of a major new site adjacent to the AONB, which is proposed to be allocated for mixed use settlement in **North East Thatcham**, (the Floral Way) which we believe is unnecessary, contrary to national planning policy and certain to cause disruption and unredeemable harm to what is currently an especially attractive and unspoilt rural area.
3. Similarly the land adjoining **The Haven, Kintbury (Site Ref: KIN6)** in which 20 dwellings are proposed, will cause overcrowding in an village area of AONB countryside, increase car fumes and cause traffic congestion in a small village location. The road network is already overcrowded with the exit and entrance used by neighbouring villages of Combe and Inkpen, which also serves the industrial estate located in Inkpen with overly large haulage vehicles.
4. The two areas above are part of the AONB/green field area. where landscape is “managed to conserve and enhance its natural beauty in accordance with its designation”.

5. CPRE believes that genuine housing needs in West Berkshire can more than adequately be met by regenerating brownfield (previously developed) land, rather than sacrificing countryside in and around the AONB or by swamping local villages with excessive development. There can be a significant reduction in the housing numbers currently imposed on West Berkshire as they are no longer binding but are merely 'advisory', due to a recent change of government policy announced by Housing Secretary, Michael Gove. West Berkshire has 53 brownfield sites totalling 46.54 hectares, which at a rough estimate would allow building of 2837 homes without the need to build on any farmland or countryside, and without damaging the impact on the rural environment, especially the AONB.

6. Many of WBC old list of 25 approved development sites have now been built on and it would be helpful if years of completion were given.

Additional comments:

1. The draft plan proposes a large strategic development area NE of Thatcham now for 1500 dwellings to 2039, although part of a plan for some 2500 in the longer term. It would run uphill to the AONB and be a source of light pollution. This has brought strong opposition from Upper Bucklebury because of its landscape and traffic impacts. Given the recent statement by minister Gove that where there are significant impacts on the landscape Councils could reduce their housing numbers: WBC should pursue this and reduce the numbers of housing..

2. There are sites along the A4 valley which would be better for housing rather than commercial use. One report mentioned developers proposal for some 170 homes in the Siege Cross/Colthrop area with a bridge crossing the railway and canal, something Thatcham badly needs, which we strongly support. Government funding should be available to implement this.

3. The uses of the area by the A329 into Newbury and along the A4 have been debated for a long time. It could be an appropriate brownfield area for mixed development with some small blocks of flats for local workers.

4. Proposals for a large distribution centre east of Thatcham was reported in Newbury News some months ago and supported by a councillor. An email of 2 Feb to WBC asking about its location received no reply. It would be bad environmentally with a lot of large lorries coming from A339 Newbury along the poor roads through Thatcham and through Aldermaston village. Policy SP8 recommends that larger distribution sites B8 should be near motorway junctions. Again, this would be a better site for some housing.

Conclusion: CPRE Berkshire believe that the two specific sites mentioned above, included in the draft Local Plan, are significantly damaging to the countryside; are unsustainable due to poor infrastructure; and cause unnecessary destruction of the landscape and green fields.