

Appendix 4b: Thatcham Site Assessments

Site Assessment

Spatial Area:	Newbury / Thatcham	Settlement:	Thatcham	Parish:	Cold Ash
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Site ID:	CA12	Site Address:	Land at Henwick Park, Bowling Green Road, Thatcham
Use(s) proposed by site promoter	Residential	Development Potential:	225 dwellings

Recommendation:

The site is not recommended or allocation.

Justification:

The Core Strategy was clear that Thatcham was to receive a lower allocation than other Urban Areas given the rapid expansion that had taken place in the town over recent years. This was to allow a period of consolidation, ensuring the infrastructure and town centre facilities could be upgraded to meet the demands of the existing population. In reviewing the vision for Thatcham as part of the Local Plan Review, and to best understand how to plan for growth in Thatcham within the plan period, the Council commissioned masterplanning work.

The masterplanning work considered all of the HELAA sites promoted in Thatcham as well as other evidence studies produced for the LPR. It identified that only growth of a strategic scale could support the service provision and regeneration that Thatcham requires. The indicative development potential at CA12 and its adjoining sites CA16 and CA17 is 325 dwellings. At THA20, the development potential is 2,500 dwellings. The masterplanning work recommended that if strategic development were to occur in Thatcham, the most appropriate locate would be north east Thatcham because. The promoters of THA20 are proposing new infrastructure including a secondary school.

One of the strategic objectives of the emerging draft Local Plan Review (LPR) is to ensure that development is planned in a way that ensures the protection and enhancement of the local distinctive character and identity of the built, historic and natural environment across the District. The LPR notes that a key feature of even the larger settlements in West Berkshire is the way in which few have coalesced in recent times and so the blurring of the physical distinction between places has largely been avoided. New development therefore needs to be appropriate in terms of location, scale and design in the context of the existing settlement form, pattern and context. Any scheme for a particular site would therefore need to be in accordance with policies SP7 (Design Principles) and SP8 (Landscape Character) of the draft emerging LPR and the Quality Design Supplementary Planning Document.

Conserving and enhancing the distinctive landscape character of the AONB is given considerable weight when assessing sites for development. The Council has therefore ensured that sites within or within the setting of the AONB have been subject to a Landscape Sensitivity/Capacity Assessment (LSA/LCA). This is a consistent assessment carried out by the Council's landscape consultant to determine whether a site could be developed without causing harm to the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB. The LCA (2015) for this site has concluded that development on the whole of this site would result in harm to the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB. Cold Ash is an AONB settlement and although it has expanded southwards out of the AONB and down the slope towards Thatcham, it retains a distinctive separate identity. The development of the whole of this site would lead to the perception of a merging of the two settlements and would therefore have an adverse impact on the AONB settlement pattern.

It is the Council's preferred approach to allocate site THA20 as a strategic site. Due to the scale of development that could take place on THA20, it is considered that there should be no further allocations in Thatcham in the period to 2037 particularly as development of both north east and north Thatcham would result in the loss of the separate identifies of Cold Ash and Bucklebury, and would harm the setting of the AONB settlement pattern.

Discussion:

Site description:

The site is located to the north of Thatcham, separated from the existing residential development by Tull Way, Bowling Green Road, Heath Lane and Cold Ash Hill. The site is some distance to the centre of Thatcham and public transport options are limited.

HELAA conclusions:

Potentially developable in part. Major surface water flood flow route passes through the site towards the east side and in the south east and south west corners. Substantial attenuation measures required to mitigate for this which will have some impact on the developable area.

Development across the whole site would be inappropriate in the context of the existing settlement form, pattern and character of the landscape.

Landscape:

Development of the whole site would lead to the perception of a merging of Cold Ash and Thatcham and would therefore have an adverse impact on the character of the landscape. The 2015 Landscape Character Assessment recommended that development in isolation of surrounding sites, ie. CA16 and CA17, would result in an unacceptable level of expansion of Thatcham north and the well-defined boundary along Bowling Green Road and Heath Lane.

Flood risk:

A major surface water flood flow route passes through the site towards the east side and in the south east and south west corners. Substantial attenuation measures required to mitigate for this which will have some impact on the developable area.

Highways / Transport:

No access issues. Accesses via an enlarged roundabout Cold Ash Hill/Heath Lane and a T junction on Bowling Green Road acceptable. Linkages through the site will be required in addition to further pedestrian accesses onto Cold Ash Hill, Heath Lane, and Bowling Green Road.

Heath Lane and Bowling Green Road already have good quality pedestrian/cycle routes. Minor mitigation to pedestrian and cycle routes will be required

Widening of Heath Lane and Bowling Green Road fronting the site will be required. A margin of land will be needed to allow for this.

No significant impact expected on local highway capacity.

Heritage:

Potential harm to setting of Henwick Old Cottage (Grade II). Heritage Impact Assessment would be required to support any future planning application.

Education:

The site is within the catchment for Cold Ash St. Marks Primary School, c.1.8km away. The scale of the impact on primary would equate to around 1 Form Entry of impact. Whilst the catchment school might struggle to accommodate these numbers, currently the wider Thatcham area could absorb this scale of impact at primary. However, schools are starting to review their accommodation and some may remove spaces, affecting the ability of Thatcham as a whole to meet any changes to population demand. Multiple sites, and therefore a larger overall impact, will likely require new provision.

In terms of secondary provision, the school is within the catchment for the Trinity School which is located c.5km away in Newbury. This would have a significant impact on Newbury provision but is not enough to justify a new school on its own. It is unlikely that existing provision could expand to mitigate this impact as there is already demographic growth to accommodate. It is likely that Newbury/Thatcham will require additional secondary provision in some form and in a suitable location to serve both communities, or at least to allow existing provision to be adjusted.

Environmental Health:

The site is close to Thatcham Air Quality Management Area. Significant risk of Particulate Matter and Nitrogen Dioxide. However, with appropriate design and layout it is considered that the impacts should be minimised.

Low risk of contamination. Low risk of noise and vibration problems to future occupants

Ecology:

A Local Wildlife Site adjoins the northern site boundary. Medium risk of adverse nature conservation impact identified by the Thames Valley Environmental Research Centre. Further assessment will be required to determine the necessary mitigation and enhancement measures.

Minerals and Waste:

Quarter of the site is within a proposed Mineral Safeguarding Area due to being underlain by construction aggregates (sand and gravel). Consideration of mineral sterilisation issues is required. Safeguarding policies apply in order to prevent needless sterilisation of mineral resources and consideration of extraction prior to any

development would be encouraged. A Minerals Resource Assessment would be required to support any future planning application.

Utility Services

Water supply

Thames Water have significant concerns regarding water supply services in relation to this site. Specifically, the water network capacity in this area is highly unlikely to be able to support the demand anticipated from this development. Significant water supply infrastructure is likely to be required to ensure sufficient capacity is brought forward ahead of the development.

Wastewater network

The scale of development is likely to require upgrades to the wastewater network. Thames Water have advised that the Developer and the Local Planning Authority should liaise with Thames Water at the earliest opportunity to agree a housing and infrastructure phasing plan.

Electricity distribution:

There is a network of existing high voltage (HV) underground cable in close proximity of the site. It is likely that HV network reinforcement and secondary substation upgrade will be required.

The combined development at this area and others fed from a common primary substation could trigger reinforcement of the primary. New transformer required, however there are space restrictions at Thatcham, so this may prove a challenge. It might be easier to build a new primary at a different location (eg. on the customer's site) and supply them from Thatcham BSP.

Gas network:

The site is not underlain by a high pressure gas transmission pipeline.

Other:

None.

Parish / Town Council:

No comments were received from Thatcham Town Council.

Cold Ash Parish Council commented that development of this site, alongside CA16 and CA17, would result in creeping urbanisation from Thatcham. This is major concern amongst Cold Ash residents. Furthermore, development would destroy the unique identity and distinctive settlements of Henwick, Cold Ash and Ashmore Green villages, and represent massive urbanisation.

Cumulatively, development of these three sites in addition to THA20 would significantly add to traffic flows and congestion. There could be some mitigation via a limited local relief road, however, this would not prevent additional traffic demand on Cold Ash Hill.

SA/SEA summary:

The SA/SEA indicates a predominantly neutral sustainability impact. There are no significant sustainability effects on the site, and in many cases development on this site will not have an impact on the sustainability objectives.

The site is close to some local services and facilities, although is some distance from the centre of Thatcham. There are opportunities for walking and cycling, all of which have a positive impact on sustainability, although car dependency is likely to be high given the limited public transport options and level of local services and facilities.

Potential negative impacts could occur in relation to the environmental sustainability due to the greenfield nature of the site, impact on biodiversity and geodiversity and the impact on the character of both landscape and the built environment.

Flooding can have a negative impact on all elements of sustainability. Mitigation measures should reduce this impact.

Availability:

The site is in multiple landownership (3 landowners) and is available in 1 to 5 years. A developer has an option on the land.

Achievability:

There are no legal constraints.

Relationship to / in combination effects of other sites:

The site is adjacent to the settlement boundary but the site is separated from existing built form by Bowling Green Road which forms a clear boundary to Thatcham. The site would need to be considered as part of a wider development scheme in conjunction with CA16 and CA17. To the east of the site is THA20 North East Thatcham.

Development of all of these sites would result in the perception of the merging Thatcham, Cold Ash and Bucklebury, and would have an adverse impact on the AONB settlement pattern.

Site Assessment

Spatial Area:	Newbury/Thatcham	Settlement:	Newbury	Parish:	Cold Ash and Shaw-cum-Donnington
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Site ID:	CA15	Site Address:	Land at Long Lane, North of Highwood Close and Shaw Cemetery
Use(s) proposed by site promoter	Residential	Development Potential:	Up to 351 dwellings but known issues exist which may reduce this number

Recommendation:

The site is not recommended for allocation

Justification:

The site is well related to Newbury with its comprehensive range of services and facilities. Overall the site is likely to have a neutral effect on sustainability and the SA/SEA does not highlight any significant sustainability effects.

Issues which would need to be resolved relate to highways and access and further information would be required on ecology, heritage and landscape. As the site is at risk of surface water flooding the site may be developable only in part and attenuation measures would need to be incorporated into the development.

Development of this site would require access from the B4009 to the A339 and should therefore be considered as part of a future potential strategic site to the north of Newbury to ensure the most sustainable outcomes. A further strategic site at Newbury would be a consideration for a future review of the Local Plan.

Discussion:

Site description:

The site lies adjacent to the Newbury settlement boundary on both sides of the B4009. It is greenfield agricultural land. To the east of the B4009 the site lies to the north of Shaw Cemetery and to the west, it is adjacent and to the north of residential development at Highwood Close. The site is part of a wider agricultural area with Highwood Farm immediately adjacent to the west of the site.

HELAA conclusions:

Potentially developable. Issues relating the access and local highway capacity and high surface water and groundwater flood risk on parts of site. Further information required on ecology and landscape.

Landscape:

The site, which is on relatively low ground, is open with little sense of seclusion, however it is enclosed by woodland along the western and eastern boundaries. The cemetery means that the eastern parcel of land is not physically adjacent to existing development. There is also a row of mature trees screening the cemetery from the eastern parcel of land. Further assessment is required to determine if development might be acceptable

Flood risk:

High surface water flood risk for north part of west site and south part of east site. Some potential for attenuation measures to control the surface water flood flow route but will involve significant engineering work and will significantly reduce developable area. High groundwater flood risk with groundwater 0-0.25m below surface and chance of emergence at significant rates over most of the site. This will prevent use of infiltration for Sustainable Drainage Systems

Highways / Transport:

This site will only be supported by Highways if provision of a through route from the B4000 to the A339 is provided. The link would assist in taking traffic away from the B4009 and the A4 / A339 / B409 Robin Hood Gyratory and the B4009 / Kiln Road mini roundabouts. The line of former DNS railway line should be retained for a potential footway / cycle route.

Heritage:

The site may lie within the extent of the 2nd Battle of Newbury. Desk-based assessment to better understand archaeological potential and survival recommended.

Education:

Newbury primary schools remain generally full and will struggle to mitigate additional demand, though new provision is planned. Likely that any more significant development will need further new provision, depending on timing of development. Secondary impact could probably be accommodated within existing plans for secondary expansion but cumulative numbers could create problem.

Environmental Health:

Low risk of noise/pollution.

Ecology:

The site is within 500 m of 3 areas of ancient woodland, priority habitat and 3 Local Wildlife Sites. It is also within 1km of an SSSI and the River Lambourn SAC with risk of harmful impacts if adequate mitigation measures are not implemented. Ecological surveys would therefore be needed to establish current site conditions and the presence of any protected species.

Minerals and Waste:

No impact

Utility Services

Water supply: Thames Water has significant concerns regarding water supply services in relation to this site. The water network capacity in this area is highly unlikely to be able to support the demand anticipated from this development. Significant water supply infrastructure is likely to be required to ensure sufficient capacity is brought forward ahead of the development. The developer should be required to provide a detailed water supply strategy informing what infrastructure is required, where, when and how it will be delivered.

Electricity distribution: SSSE: There is a network of existing HV underground cable in close proximity of the site. It is likely that HV network reinforcement and secondary substation upgrade will be required.

Other: None

Parish / Town Council:

Cold Ash: Site could create flooding and traffic problems but if suitably mitigated believe a moderate, contained development might be suitable, principally as it would not place as much traffic pressure on Ashmore Green and Cold Ash. With a link to the A339 it would help balance the increased impact away from the Thatcham urban area.

Shaw-cum-Donnington: Not preferred due to flooding issues and lack of road infrastructure. The B4009 is a narrow winding road, with no pavement for most of its length, which is not suitable for additional traffic. Both east and west land parcels are active farming fields and subject to severe flooding, which travels east from the western side (hilly) across the B4009, then floods down into Shaw Cemetery and so to Wellington Close and Cromwell Rd. In addition, this has also flooded some gardens in Highwood Close. The combined development would detract from the pleasant access to Newbury and push the urban environment along the B4009.

SA/SEA summary:

Overall the site is likely to have a neutral effect on sustainability and the SA/SEA does not highlight any significant sustainability effects. The site is close to local services and facilities with opportunities for walking, cycling, and use of public transport which could have a positive effect in terms of sustainability. Development also has the potential to negatively impact upon environmental sustainability due to the site being greenfield and Grade 2 agricultural land.

Development may have an impact upon flood risk due to parts of the site being at risk of surface water flooding and there being high groundwater levels. Avoidance of development in the areas at risk will be necessary and SuDS will reduce the impact.

Development may have an impact on the built environment. Further assessment required to fully assess the impact.

There will be several positive impacts upon the environmental sustainability of the site. The site sits within a Biodiversity Opportunity Area and biodiversity enhancements and net gain will be sought through LPR policy SP11.

The estimated development potential on the site means that affordable housing need to be provided and the development potential would enable be a mix of housing type and tenure.

The development of the site for housing will have a neutral effect on economic sustainability. Whilst housing development contributes towards economic development in the short term through the construction of the site, it is not seen to promote key business sectors and business development in the longer term.

Availability:

Land in 2 ownerships and identified by promoter as immediately available.

Achievability:

The Council's Highways Team have identified that a route is required from the B4009 to the A339. They will only support the site if this is delivered. Achievability unknown.

Relationship to / in combination effects of other sites :

Development of this site would require access from the B4009 to the A339 and should therefore be considered as part of a future potential strategic site to the north of Newbury which would require comprehensive master planning.

Site Assessment

Spatial Area:	Newbury / Thattham	Settlement:	Thattham	Parish:	Cold Ash
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Site ID:	CA17	Site Address:	Regency Park Hotel, Bowling Green Road, Thattham
Use(s) proposed by site promoter	Residential or residential/specialist residential (C2 use class) mix	Development Potential:	Up to 55 dwellings but but known issues exist which may reduce this number. As a mixed use scheme, up to 28 dwellings and 105 bedspaces

Recommendation:

The site is not recommended or allocation.

Justification:

The Core Strategy was clear that Thattham was to receive a lower allocation than other Urban Areas given the rapid expansion that had taken place in the town over recent years. This was to allow a period of consolidation, ensuring the infrastructure and town centre facilities could be upgraded to meet the demands of the existing population. In reviewing the vision for Thattham as part of the Local Plan Review, and to best understand how to plan for growth in Thattham within the plan period, the Council commissioned masterplanning work.

The masterplanning work considered all of the HELAA sites promoted in Thattham as well as other evidence studies produced for the LPR. It identified that only growth of a strategic scale could support the service provision and regeneration that Thattham requires. The indicative development potential at CA17 and its adjoining sites CA12 and CA16 is 325 dwellings. At THA20, the development potential is 2,500 dwellings. The masterplanning work recommended that if strategic development were to occur in Thattham, the most appropriate locate would be north east Thattham because.

One of the strategic objectives of the emerging draft Local Plan Review (LPR) is to ensure that development is planned in a way that ensures the protection and enhancement of the local distinctive character and identity of the built, historic and natural environment across the District. The LPR notes that a key feature of even the larger settlements in West Berkshire is the way in which few have coalesced in recent times and so the blurring of the physical distinction between places has largely been avoided. New development therefore needs to be appropriate in terms of location, scale and design in the context of the existing settlement form, pattern and context. Any scheme for a particular site would therefore need to be in accordance with policies SP7 (Design Principles) and SP8 (Landscape Character) of the draft emerging LPR and the Quality Design Supplementary Planning Document.

Conserving and enhancing the distinctive landscape character of the AONB is given considerable weight when assessing sites for development. The Council has therefore ensured that sites within or within the setting of the AONB have been subject to a Landscape Sensitivity/Capacity Assessment (LSA/LCA). This is a consistent assessment carried out by the Council's landscape consultant to determine whether a site could be developed without causing harm to the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB. The LCA (2015) for this site has concluded that development on the whole of this site would result in harm to the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB. Cold Ash is an AONB settlement and although it has expanded southwards out of the AONB and down the slope towards Thattham, it retains a distinctive separate identity. The development of the whole of this site would lead to the perception of a merging of the two settlements and would therefore have an adverse impact on the AONB settlement pattern.

It is the Council's preferred approach to allocate site THA20 as a strategic site. Due to the scale of development that could take place on THA20, it is considered that there should be no further allocations in Thattham in the period to 2037 particularly as development of both north east and north Thattham would result in the loss of the separate identifies of Cold Ash and Bucklebury, and would harm the setting of the AONB settlement pattern.

Discussion:

Site description:

The site is located to the north of Thattham, separated from the existing settlement by Tull Way/Bowling Green Road. The site is some distance from the centre of Thattham and public transport options are limited.

HELAA conclusions:

Potentially developable. The site has potential however this is subject to a series of mitigation measures to conserve and enhance the AONB; and to maintain the character of the land north of Thatcham.

Further information required on ecology before a robust decision can be made.

Landscape:

The Landscape Capacity Assessment (2015) recommended that development of the site would not result in harm to the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB. However, the site could be considered further in conjunction with CA12 and CA16, subject to a series of mitigation measures.

Development of this site is dependent on a wider scheme to include CA12 and CA16. Development in isolation of surrounding sites in accordance with the LCA, would result in unacceptable level of expansion of Thatcham north and the well-defined settlement boundary along Bowling Green Road and Heath Lane.

Flood risk:

Minor surface water flood risk at far south of site which can be mitigated for.

Highways / Transport:

Accesses via an enlarged roundabout Cold Ash Hill/Heath Lane and a T junction on Bowling Green Road acceptable. Linkages through the site will be required in addition to further pedestrian accesses onto Cold Ash Hill, Heath Lane, and Bowling Green Road.

Heath Lane and Bowling Green Road already have good quality pedestrian/cycle routes. Minor mitigation to pedestrian and cycle routes will be required

Widening of Heath Lane and Bowling Green Road fronting the site will be required. A margin of land will be needed to allow for this.

No impact on local highway capacity.

Heritage:

No impact on designated heritage assets. Non-designated heritage assets – site within area of high archaeological potential. Heritage Impact Assessment required.

Education:

The site is within the catchment for Cold Ash St. Marks Primary School, c.2.4km away. The scale of development could be absorbed into the catchment population in isolation. Cold Ash would struggle to accommodate a number of small developments, or a single larger development. Currently there are around 25 catchment pupils in the area and around 50% chose the school. If these trends continue then a modest amount of development could be accommodated. The site cannot expand, therefore larger developments or a combination of smaller developments would likely require new provision. Travel distances to other schools are likely to incur transport costs for the Council, as they are beyond the Home to School transport thresholds. These transport costs would be significant, are revenue in nature and cannot be recovered from the CIL funding stream so would place a burden on the Council. The majority of schools in the area are small, have restricted sites and have little capacity to expand.

In terms of secondary provision, the school is within the catchment for the Trinity School which is located c.4.5km away in Newbury. A single development of this scale could be incorporated into our existing plans and so could be mitigated. Cumulative development of this size would be problematic, however, and would need to form part of the Education Teams plan for the Newbury/Thatcham area.

Environmental Health:

The site is close to Thatcham Air Quality Management Area. Possible risk of Particulate Matter and Nitrogen Dioxide. However, with appropriate design and layout it is considered that the impacts should be minimised.

Low risk of contamination. Low risk of noise and vibration problems to future occupants

Ecology:

Medium risk of adverse nature conservation impact identified by the Thames Valley Environmental Research Centre. Further assessment will be required to determine the necessary mitigation and enhancement measures.

Minerals and Waste:

Southern quarter of the site is within a Mineral Safeguarding Area due to being underlain by construction aggregates (sand and gravel). Consideration of mineral sterilisation issues is required. Safeguarding policies apply in order to prevent needless sterilisation of mineral resources and consideration of extraction prior to any

development would be encouraged. A Minerals Resource Assessment would be required to support any future planning application.

Utility Services

Water supply:
No issues.

Wastewater network:
The scale of development is likely to require upgrades to the wastewater network. Thames Water have advised that the Developer and the Local Planning Authority should liaise with Thames Water at the earliest opportunity to agree a housing and infrastructure phasing plan.

Electricity distribution:
There is a network of existing high voltage (HV) underground cable in close proximity of the site. It is likely that HV network reinforcement and secondary substation upgrade will be required.

The combined development at this area and others fed from a common primary substation could trigger reinforcement of the primary. New transformer required, however there are space restrictions at Thatcham, so this may prove a challenge. It might be easier to build a new primary at a different location (eg. on the customer's site) and supply them from Thatcham BSP.

Gas network:
The site is not underlain by a high pressure gas transmission pipeline.

Other:

Parish / Town Council:

No comments were received from Thatcham Town Council.

Cold Ash Parish Council commented that development of this site, alongside CA12 and CA16, would result in creeping urbanisation from Thatcham. This is major concern amongst Cold Ash residents. Furthermore, development would destroy the unique identity and distinctive settlements of Henwick, Cold Ash and Ashmore Green villages, and represent massive urbanisation.

Cumulatively, development of these three sites in addition to THA20 would significantly add to traffic flows and congestion. There could be some mitigation via a limited local relief road, however, this would not prevent additional traffic demand on Cold Ash Hill.

SA/SEA summary:

Overall the site is likely to have a predominantly neutral effect on sustainability, and the SA/SEA does not highlight any significant sustainability effects.

Whilst the site is close to some local services and facilities, it is some distance from the centre of Thatcham and relates poorly to the existing settlement. This has the potential to have a negative impact upon environmental sustainability. There are opportunities for walking and cycling and whilst public transport options are available these are limited and it is likely will lead to a high level of car dependency.

The site is brownfield land which will have a positive impact on environmental sustainability.

Potential negative impacts could occur in relation to the environmental sustainability due to the greenfield nature of the site and the impact on the character of both landscape and the built environment.

Availability:

The site is in a single landownership and is available immediately. The site is owned by a developer.

Achievability:

There are no legal constraints.

Relationship to / in combination effects of other sites :

The site is adjacent to the settlement boundary but the site is separated from existing built form by Bowling Green Road which forms a clear boundary to Thatcham. The site would need to be considered as part of a wider development scheme in conjunction with CA12 and CA16. To the east of the site is THA20 North East Thatcham.

Development of all of these sites would result in the perception of the merging Thatcham, Cold Ash and Bucklebury, and would have an adverse impact on the AONB settlement pattern.

Spatial Area:	Newbury/Thatcham	Settlement:	Thatcham	Parish:	Thatcham
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Site ID:	THA9	Site Address:	Land at Lower Way Farm, Thatcham
Use(s) proposed by site promoter	Residential	Development Potential:	36 dwellings

Recommendation:

The site is not recommended for allocation

Justification:

The Core Strategy was clear that Thatcham was to receive a lower allocation than other Urban Areas given the rapid expansion that had taken place in the town over recent years. This was to allow a period of consolidation, ensuring the infrastructure and town centre facilities could be upgraded to meet the demands of the existing population. In reviewing the vision for Thatcham as part of the Local Plan Review, and to best understand how to plan for growth in Thatcham within the plan period, the Council commissioned masterplanning work.

The masterplanning work considered all of the HELAA sites promoted in Thatcham as well as other evidence studies produced for the LPR. It identified that only growth of a strategic scale could support the service provision and regeneration that Thatcham requires. The indicative development potential at THA9 is 36 dwellings. The development potential at other sites in Thatcham is far greater. The masterplanning work recommended that if strategic development were to occur in Thatcham, the most appropriate location would be north east Thatcham.

There are concerns that development may reduce the open countryside between Thatcham and Newbury / Greenham, and introduce built form to south of Lower Way. The site is a buffer to development and forms part of the open character along this side of Lower Way. There is further concern that development would not be appropriate in the context of the existing settlement form, pattern and character of the landscape.

Development would have a significant impact on education provision in Thatcham. It is the preference of the Council's Education Team that there is a scale of housing (either from a single or a number of developments) that can yield new secondary provision.

The site is adjacent to a sewage treatment works. It is considered that the location may impact on the quality of life for future residents.

The Sustainability Appraisal (SA) / Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) indicates a predominantly neutral sustainability impact. There are no significant sustainability effects on the site, and in many cases development on this site will not have an impact on the sustainability objectives.

Nevertheless, there are some factors and effects that will require further investigation, planning and mitigation to ensure the most sustainable outcomes in relation to ecology, odour, air quality, landscape, and to ensure utilities are made available in a timely manner.

Discussion:

Site description:

The site is located to the south of Thatcham, north of the Nature Discovery Centre. It is close to Thatcham town centre and local services and facilities. The site comprises of a residential dwelling and garden, as well as a former farmstead. There is tree cover and hedgerows along the northern, eastern and southern site boundaries.

HELAA conclusions:

Potentially developable in part. Concern that development would not be appropriate in the context of the existing settlement form, pattern and character of the landscape. Odours from the sewage works could impact upon the quality of life for future residents. High risk of adverse nature conservation impacts.

Landscape:

The site forms part of the Kennet Lower River Valley character area. The area has a strong rural and sparsely settled character despite its proximity to Thatcham. The pressure for development adjacent to Thatcham is encroaching on the valley floor character and so part of the landscape strategy for the area is to conserve this character and to restore, extend and manage wetland habitats that occur along the floodplain.

The Thatcham Landscape Sensitivity Study (LSS, 2009) identifies the site as being located within an area (Thatcham Lakes) which provides an important open area which physically and visually separates Newbury from Thatcham.

Site itself is a buffer to development and forms part of the open character along this side of Lower Way. Concern that development would not be appropriate in the context of the existing settlement form, pattern and character of the landscape. Further assessment required if the site were to be considered further.

Site lies within the West Berkshire Living Landscape; development proposals will need to support the objectives of the Living Landscape project.

Flood risk:

The site is predominantly located within Flood Zone 1, however a small part of the southern area falls within Flood Zones 2 and 3a. There is surface water flood risk on the southern site boundary. Development will need to be avoided in these areas.

There are high groundwater levels and a chance of emergence across the whole site. This will prevent the use of infiltration Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS), and SuDS will need to take the form of 'wetland' to merge into existing reedbeds to the south.

Highways / Transport:

No issues.

Heritage:

No impact on designated heritage assets.

Possible undesignated heritage assets on the site – remains may survive from a post Medieval farm that was once located on the site. High potential for Upper Palaeolithic/Mesolithic archaeological remains within this site. In the event that the site is allocated, then any planning application would need to be accompanied by a desk-based assessment to better understand archaeological potential and survival. In addition, fieldwork techniques will be required to better understand the Mesolithic potential may be necessary

Education:

The site is within the catchment for Parsons Down Infant and Parsons Down Junior Schools, which are c.0.8 and 0.6km from the site respectively. The scale of development on this site would be absorbed into the catchment population. The catchment school should be able to absorb this scale of impact. However, schools are starting to review their accommodation and some may remove spaces, affecting the ability of Thatcham as a whole to meet any changes to population demand. Multiple sites, and therefore a larger overall impact, will likely require new provision.

The catchment secondary school is Trinity School in Newbury, c.3.5km away. This would have a significant impact on Thatcham provision which has reached its ability to accommodate more numbers. On its own this development is not large enough to justify a new school. It is more likely that Newbury/Thatcham will require additional secondary provision in some form and in a suitable location to serve both communities, or at least to allow existing provision to be adjusted. It would therefore be preferable, from an education perspective, to propose a scale of housing (either from a single or a number of developments) that can yield new secondary provision. It can be difficult to plan new provision for multiple sites and this should also be a consideration. The LA could not front fund this scale of provision and so careful planning would be required.

Environmental Health:

Site near A4 and Thatcham Air Quality Management Area. Site is also impacted by odours from the sewage treatment works which are adjacent to the site. An air quality assessment would be required.

Possible Particulate Matter from construction and operational impacts. There are no known contamination issues on the site. Medium risk of noise and vibration problems to future residents from nearby commercial uses.

Ecology:

Kennet and Lambourn Floodplain Special Area of Conservation, Thatcham Reed Beds Site of Special Scientific Interest, and a Local Nature Reserve are c. 60m from the site. Natural England have advised that development has the potential to affect the integrity of the Nature 2000 sites. In particular, their concerns will be around hydrological impacts and connectivity and will likely need assessment under the Habitats Regulations.

Up to date ecological surveys would be needed to establish current site conditions and the presence of any protected species on the site. Further assessment required to determine impact upon the SSSI and SAC.

The site is within a Biodiversity Opportunity Area.

Minerals and Waste:

The site is entirely in a Mineral Safeguarding Area. The site is underlain by construction aggregates (mainly sand and gravel) and so a Minerals Impact Assessment would be required.

Utility Services*Water supply:*

Thames Water have advised that the supply required for the proposed scale of development is a significant additional demand in the Water Resource area. Currently the mains that feed the Water Resource area are running close to or at capacity. The scale of development is likely to require upgrades to the wastewater network. A housing and infrastructure phasing plan would therefore be required which should determine the magnitude of spare capacity currently available within the network and what phasing may be required to ensure development does not outpace delivery of essential network upgrades.

Wastewater network:

The scale of development is likely to require upgrades to the wastewater network. Thames Water have advised that the Developer and the Local Planning Authority should liaise with Thames Water at the earliest opportunity to agree a housing and infrastructure phasing plan.

Electricity network:

Scottish and Southern Electric have commented that there is a network of existing High Voltage (HV) overhead lines (OHLs) and underground cable in close proximity of the site. It is highly likely that HV network reinforcement and / or secondary substation upgrade will be required. This is also dependent capacity required at the time of connection.

In addition, the combined development at this area and others fed from a common primary substation could trigger reinforcement of the primary. New transformer required, however there are space restrictions at Thatcham, so this may prove a challenge. It might be easier to build a new primary at a different location (on the customer's site) and supply them from Thatcham BSP.

Gas network:

The site is not underlain by a high pressure gas transmission pipeline.

Other:

None

Town Council:

No comments.

SA/SEA summary:

Overall the site is likely to have a neutral effect on sustainability and the SA/SEA does not highlight any significant sustainability effects.

The site is close to local services and facilities with opportunities for walking, cycling, and use of public transport which could have a positive effect in terms of sustainability. The site is adjacent to the sewage treatment works which could negatively impact upon the air quality. Further assessment required to fully determine the impact.

Development also has the potential to negatively impact upon environmental sustainability due to the site being greenfield. However, the LPR is clear that for the district's housing requirement to be met, development on greenfield sites on the edge of settlements is necessary.

Development may have an impact upon flood risk due to parts of the site being at a medium and high risk of fluvial flooding and there being surface water flood risk on part of the southern site boundary. Avoidance of development in this area and SuDS will reduce the impact. The West Berkshire SuDS SPD seeks techniques that not only drain the site, but provide other benefits such as improving water quality, resilience to climate change, public amenity, green infrastructure, and biodiversity.

Development may have an impact on the built environment due to the site forming part of the open character along the southern side of Lower Way, as well as being a buffer to development. Further assessment required to fully determine impact.

There will be several positive impacts upon the environmental sustainability of the site. The site sits within a Biodiversity Opportunity Area and biodiversity enhancements and net gain will be sought through LPR policy SP11. Through LPR policies SP5 and SP7, development presents an opportunity to reduce greenhouse gas

emissions and create high quality locally distinctive design and places. The estimated development potential on the site means that affordable housing need to be provided as it is above the threshold which triggers the LPR affordable housing policy (SP19). Likewise, the development potential would enable be a mix of housing type and tenure. The estimated development potential has been guided by the West Berkshire Density Pattern Book Study which has taken into account the location of sites to ensure that the density is appropriate to the location. These all result in positive effects. The development of the site for housing will have a neutral effect on economic sustainability. Whilst housing development contributes towards economic development in the short term through the construction of the site, it is not seen to promote key business sectors and business development in the longer term.

Availability:

The site is owned by two private landowners and is available immediately.

Achievability:

There are no known legal constraints at this time

Relationship to / in combination effects of other sites:

The majority of sites considered through the HELAA in Thatcham were located to the north and north east of the town. There was one other site located to the south but this was assessed as 'not developable within the next 15 years'. There is a site that is allocated in the existing Local Plan c.0.7km to the east.

Site Assessment

Spatial Area:	Newbury/Thatcham	Settlement:	Thatcham	Parish:	Thatcham
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Site ID:	THA20	Site Address:	Land at Bath Road, Thatcham
Use(s) proposed by site promoter	Residential-led development with infrastructure	Development Potential:	Up to 2,500 dwellings with associated infrastructure requirements

Recommendation:

The site is recommended for allocation.

Justification:

The site is well related to the existing town of Thatcham. It is in close proximity to a range of services and facilities, including the train station. Thatcham is an urban area with a wide range of services and opportunities for employment, community and education. Development of a strategic nature at this site would support the service provision and regeneration that Thatcham requires.

The Sustainability Appraisal (SA) / Strategic Environmental Assessment indicates a predominantly significantly positive sustainability impact. There are a number of positive and significant positive sustainability effects that developing the site would have, including maximising the provision of: affordable housing; custom and self-build plots; new green infrastructure and public open space, new community infrastructure including primary and secondary schools; and improvements to the cycling and walking network to improve opportunities for sustainable travel. In addition, the site's sustainable location on the edge of Thatcham town will encourage healthy lifestyles and use of sustainable means of transport.

In contrast there are very few negative impacts that developing the site would have. Nevertheless, there are some factors and effects that will require further investigation, planning and mitigation to ensure the most sustainable outcomes and to ensure utilities are made available in a timely manner. Issues which would need to be resolved particularly relate to highways and access and further information would be required on ecology and landscape. As the site is at risk of surface water flooding, attenuation measures would need to be incorporated into any development. Development would need to be avoided on the areas at risk.

Discussion:

Site description: The site is located to the east of Thatcham, on the north side of the Kennet Valley within which both Newbury and Thatcham sit. At its closest point, the site is around 1km from the town centre, and around 1km from Thatcham's railway station, located in the south-eastern end of the town adjacent to the Kennet & Avon Canal. The site is approximately 3km long and varies in width between 500m and 950m. The total area is 176.8ha, including the small piece of land of around 5ha to the south of the A4 adjacent to Colthrop Industrial Estate.

HELAA conclusions:

Potentially developable in part. Concern that development would not be appropriate in the context of the existing settlement form, pattern and character of the landscape. Landscape assessment required. Surface water flood flow route through parts of site. Attenuation measures necessary. Limited potential for infiltration on parts of site due to high ground water on the northern part of site which may reduce developable area. Further transport modelling required. High risk of adverse nature conservation impacts. Areas of ancient woodland and Local Wildlife Sites adjacent to the site - development will be subject to ecological survey and implementation of appropriate mitigation where practical.

Landscape:

The site is located on the lower northern slopes of the Kennet Valley, where the land rises from the wide valley flood plain to reach towards the North Wessex Downs, and Bucklebury Common. This is a significantly different landscape character from development elsewhere in Thatcham (except for at the northern fringes towards Cold Ash), which is contained within the valley floor – between 65m and 75m elevation. The topography of the site is highly varied, with the slopes rising to three distinct high points of around 125m. The north-western part of the site starts rising from around 85m near Floral Way, and the eastern end of the site starts rising from around 75m near the A4 Bath Road.

The Thatcham Strategic Growth Study (2020) uses a first principles approach to analysing the landscape form and the appropriate built form response. The site would be expected to take a landscape-led approach to development and further assessment and detail would be expected to accompany any application submitted.

Flood risk:

Fluvial flood risk – none. There is a risk of surface water flooding with the site along the natural drainage routes based on EA modelling. The site is crossed by a number of ephemeral watercourses and these corridors would need to form part of a wider SuDs strategy to help manage the runoff from any new development.

Highways / Transport:

A development of this size would require multiple vehicle accesses with all accesses being linked through the development. Development would have a very significant impact on the local highway network. Opportunities for modal shift should be maximised. A transport assessment would also be required.

Heritage:

Potential harm to setting of Siege Cross Farm: Barn at Siege Cross Farm (Grade II), Cart at Siege Cross Farm (Grade II), and Barn at Colthrop Manor (Grade II). Heritage Impact Assessment required.

Education:

Thatcham requires additional secondary provision which this scale of development would support. In addition, the development would need to be self-sufficient in education terms, therefore 2 new primary schools (1 x 3FE, 1 x 2FE) and a new secondary school (8FE) would be required.

Environmental Health:

Site near A4 and Thatcham Air Quality Management Area. Low to high risk of noise and vibration problems, from road and commercial, to future residents. However, with appropriate design and layout it is considered that the impacts should be minimised.

Ecology:

There are no statutory designations of protected wildlife sites within the North East Thatcham site boundaries.

The Kennet and Avon Canal, south of the railway line, is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and development to the north would have to consider the water quality of any surface water discharged to the south. The site is within 2km of the Kennet and Lambourn Floodplain Special Area of Conservation.

Much of the upper slopes are designated a Biodiversity Opportunity Area, part of the Bucklebury Plateau BOA, and the site is within a local habitat network. This indicates that a net gain in biodiversity should be delivered through development.

Up to date ecological surveys will be required to determine detailed mitigation measures.

Minerals and Waste:

British Geological Survey data identifies that the site is underlain in part by construction aggregate mineral deposits. Therefore, a Minerals Resource Assessment will be carried out to determine the possibility of prior extraction of the mineral in accordance with saved policies 1, 2 and 2A of the Replacement Minerals Local Plan for Berkshire.

Utility Services

SSE has commented that there is a network of existing HV overhead lines (OHLs) and underground cable in close proximity of the site. It is highly likely that HV network reinforcement and/or secondary substation upgrade will be required. This will be dependent on capacity required at the time of connection. In addition, the combined development at this area fed from a common primary substation could trigger reinforcement of the primary. New transformer required, however there are space restrictions at Thatcham, so this may prove a challenge. Building a new primary at a different location (on the customer's site) and supply them from Thatcham BSP an option.

Thames Water comments that significant water supply infrastructure is likely to be required to ensure sufficient capacity is brought forward ahead of the development. A detailed water supply strategy will be required, informing what infrastructure is required and where, when and how it will be delivered. The recommendations of any such strategy would be required to be implemented ahead of occupation of any possible development.

Parish / Town Council:

No comments received from Midgham PC. Concern from Cold Ash PC and NDP group regarding the increased traffic associated with the site.

SA/SEA summary:

Predominately positive impact. Significantly positive effects in terms of enabling provision of housing, improving wellbeing and reducing inequalities, improving accessibility to services and maximising opportunities for sustainable travel. There would be some negative impacts such as loss of greenfield land and noise pollution.

The Thatcham Strategic Growth Study identifies that the most sustainable way for Thatcham to secure additional infrastructure is for strategic housing development to occur. Housing development of this scale provides additional workforce and customers which has the potential to support commercial centres.

Availability:

The site is in multiple ownership (4 landowners). It is available for development in 1-5 years.

Achievability:

Developers have option agreements on land owned by 3 of the 4 landowners.

Relationship to / in combination effects of other sites:

Other sites were promoted adjacent and nearby in Thatcham town. Nearby sites were also promoted in Cold Ash and Bucklebury parishes with many assessed as not developable within the next 15 years in the HELAA. Site CA12 is the largest site promoted nearby and while assessed as potentially developable in part in the HELAA and predominantly neutral in the SA-SEA, is not being recommended for allocation. This site is of such a scale that it would provide new services and facilities that would be available to surrounding settlements like Cold Ash and Bucklebury.