

development and location is unsound. In this case, the district council cannot be allowed to embark on another planning folly akin to Sandford that will face inevitable challenges, likely failure and housing delay, harm to health, gridlock in Thatcham and leading to additional costs that taxpayers across the whole of West Berkshire will end up paying for.

Far from this being the advertised "plan for the future", with development reported to start in 2024, this must be recognised by the district council as a plan from the past and a fundamental rethink is urgently required.

**JOHN A BOYD**  
Chairman of planning and  
highways  
Thatcham Town Council

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## Conservatives dedicated to protecting the AONB

I AM grateful to last week's letter from Thatcham Lib Dem councillor Simon Pike for reassuring the voters of rural West Berkshire that the Liberal Democrats would allocate the houses (and associated infrastructure) planned for North East Thatcham "across the district", which is of course 90 per cent rural and 74 per cent an Area of Outstanding natural Beauty.

In particular, the voters in my own ward of Basildon (Basildon, Streatley, Aldworth and Ashampstead), which he specifically referred to, will be very interested to hear the Liberal Democrats are in favour of more

housing sites in such sensitive rural locations.

We Conservatives on the other hand are dedicated to protecting the AONB and thus strictly controlling all developments within it.

Our beautiful North Wessex Downs AONB is after all the first piece of continuous open countryside one encounters as one travels west from London.

It will remain safe in our hands for all the people of West Berkshire to enjoy.

**ALAN LAW**  
Conservative councillor for  
Basildon ward  
West Berkshire Council

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## Policing bill threatens our democratic rights

OUR Newbury Conservative MP, Laura Farris, discussed the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill in last week's *Newbury Weekly News*.

No matter how the Conservatives dress up this bill, as Laura Farris attempted to do last week, the bill is deeply flawed.

The legislation, which would grant powers to curb actions that "result in serious disruption to the activities of an organisation" or have a "relevant impact on persons in the vicinity", has significant implications for peaceful protest.

It threatens our democratic rights for non-violently demonstrating on issues that concern us as citizens.

Freedom of speech, association and assembly are cornerstones of British