Dear Sir

Consultation - Proposed Submission (Reg 19) West Berkshire Local Plan Review 2022-2039

I should like to register my objection to West Berkshire Council's LPR of 2023 for several reasons. The most basic reason is that updated guidance on these matters is due to be published later this year by the government and if this plan is proceeded upon it may become outdated and open to legal challenges if implemented leading to delays and missed targets. It is anticipated that the government's required numbers of houses in each area will be reduced, which is most significant. The plan also contradicts the national guidelines on impact on AONBs.

There is insufficient information about who provided the information used in preparing this report, who paid the costs and who put it together. The plan has no explanation as to how it will be enacted in the time span covered by the report.

The LPR lacks detailed and transparent supporting evidence to the assumptions used. This is particularly vital regarding the numbers and types of housing needed in the future. With the lack of substantive detail, it must be assumed that the any new estates will be the usual, high profit mix of executive and middle management houses. Given the current and foreseeable situation the biggest requirement must be affordable and social housing, true vision would provide a lot more of these types. The plans talk of a percentage of affordable housing but experience shows that the number of these reduce as developers find unforeseen profitability problems, the WBC roll over and a reduction in number is agreed. We should be catering for a high percentage of the types of housing all of the community need not just those with the income to buy.

In the LPR there is no effective detail on mitigating the effects of the extra housing on the social, physical and environmental infrastructure. With the existing pressures on all of these no LPR can ignore this matter. The effects on traffic, schools, doctors, care homes, drainage, water supplies, education, countryside etc will be very significant. The plan does not address the need and cost for extra schools, GP surgeries, care provision, road improvements, new paths in local villages as commuting traffic increases. The roads around Newbury are already very busy and these plans will put extra traffic on all of the C roads as new rat runs to the motorway junctions become used.

Any LPR should be looking at alternatives to simple large estates and there is no detailed confirmation this has been done. The capacity of smaller developments, brownfield sites, unbuilt planning permissions, and utility of other areas should all be quantified.

All development plans should take into account their effect on the immediate and local communities. To provide large estates means smaller communities become one big urban sprawl to the detriment of living standards generally. For instance to enlarge Thatcham by 1500 to a potential 2500 would mean Thatcham, Newbury and local villages like Cold Ash and Upper Bucklebury run one into another. Having resisted closing the green gap between Thatcham and Newbury for this reason it is ridiculous to propose this many houses around North Thatcham.

On the North East Thatcham plan for a very large housing estate, my particular objections are:

There will be increased traffic through Upper Bucklebury and Chapel Row and a problem at the junction on the Pangbourne road; On 6th January WBC proposed a new roundabout on the narrow Harts Hill road to allow traffic in and out of the northern end of the development, and a car park, also on Harts Hill; this will cause additional congestion on the A4. Cold Ash will see a large flow of traffic going towards Chieveley and the M4. The roads are narrow and many do not have pavements; cycling would not be safe.

There is insufficient capacity at Kennet school (oversubscribed) and no other plan has been made. School provision has not been costed. Sports fields and facilities on such a gradient have not been costed.

On Wildlife: Bucklebury common would be subjected to an increased number of visitors and the delicate ecosystem would be damaged beyond repair. There is no evidence of or any strategy for increased biodiversity. A "country park" mentioned in the plan does not meet the accepted definition, and the three small areas inside the settlement boundary are not of any proper environmental value, some "wildflower meadows" will not help red-listed nightjars or great crested newts.

The strategic gap between Thatcham and Bucklebury; Upper Bucklebury will lose its identity when Thatcham and Bucklebury merge in this plan. A developer in Cold Ash has just been refused permission for this reason.

Medical provision: additional GP surgeries are not part of the NHS strategy for the future. No local surgeries have the manpower to support a satellite surgery of 450 square metres as suggested.

Number of houses: Initially 2500 houses were to be built in total, 1250 in the plan period. This has now been increased to 1500 to be built by 2039. Any mitigation of the impact of the development should be largely completed before sales however what normally happens is that the developer pleads poverty and delays this work until the site is largely complete. The developer will wish to utilise the area originally designated to build the remaining 1000 after this LPR plan period finishes.

This LPR is unsound for the reasons stated above.

Yours faithfully

Liz Butcher

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