

From: [REDACTED]  
To: [PlanningPolicy](#)  
Subject: Fwd: NE Thatcham development plan  
Date: 27 February 2023 11:26:27

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Dear Sir/Madam

I apologise for sending the earlier email before it was finished. Here is the completed version.

Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing to register my objections to the scheme to develop the NE Thatcham site.

Firstly, may I mention that several areas of the plan seem unsound and unsubstantiated.

The development would have a hugely detrimental effect on the local area for many reasons.

#### 1. Traffic and pollution

1,500 homes probably equals at least 3000 new vehicles, each doing at least 2 journeys a day, more if children are driven to school.

Living in Beenham, a small village with narrow, winding roads, many with no footways, any increase in traffic would have a detrimental effect and endanger the many pedestrians, cyclists and horse-riders who live here. Whenever there is a problem on the A4 we see increased amounts of people driving through the village, most of whom do not appreciate the dangers.

The A4 is regularly at a stand-still at rush hour and drivers heading east may well think it quicker to go up Harts Hill and through Southend Bradfield to the A340. That junction is often backed up to Parkers Corner and satnav suggests Beenham as a preferable option to get to the A4. We really do not need more traffic on our narrow roads.

Even if all the new residents "only" use the main road it would cause major problems for Beenham residents trying to turn right on to the A4. This junction has been flagged up to WBC several times because it is dangerous and poorly marked but nothing has been done to improve it. The white lines in the centre of the junction do not allow for traffic coming from several different directions at once. It often takes many minutes to negotiate even when there isn't a huge amount of traffic, because of all the entries and exits on to the crossing point. Are the proposed "new priority" road junctions on Floral Way and Harts Hill going to be as poorly designed as the A4 turn at Beenham?

Where are all these new residents going to shop? Are more car parks going to be built in Thatcham town centre? If so, where? And if Reading is the destination, how will the A4 cope with all the extra traffic, and where will they park?

The lack of a coherent Plan on Schools Provision across the various proposed developments also means that it is impossible to estimate the subsequent impact on traffic. The siting of a secondary school to the NE of Thatcham would result in a significant increase in traffic across the whole Thatcham area.

The Sustainability Appraisal (SA) / Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) which accompanies the Local Plan consultation assesses the allocation of North East Thatcham against key Sustainability Objectives. Objective 4 is – To promote and maximise opportunities for all forms of safe and sustainable transport. The SEA makes the following assessments: 'To Reduce Accidents and Improve Safety' Council Assessment - The policy is likely to have a Positive Impact on road safety as safe travel will be critical to the design of the site. This is not the case for residents of nearby villages.

The policy also mentions sustainable transport links and cycling. However it should be noted that WBC has a very poor track record on providing good cycle pathways. Cycling along the A4 between Newbury and Theale is definitely not for the faint-hearted, with designated cycle lanes often only running for a few dozen metres, stopping, and starting again further on, or being unusable because of flooding or fallen trees which are not cleared for months.

If new residents are encouraged to travel by train, where should they park? There is very little car park space at Thatcham station.

## 2. Infrastructure

At the most recent Parish Council meeting, 6th February 2023, our district councillor was unable to answer questions about infrastructure on the proposed site, despite being himself the lead on education, which was rather worrying.

## 3. Healthcare

Our local surgeries are already at full capacity, with staff regularly suffering stress-related problems due to the increasing demands on their time and diminishing funding and support. The major central pharmacy in Thatcham was recently closed. It is virtually impossible to get a dentist's appointment on the NHS in Thatcham. Knowing all this, why has nothing been done by WBC and the developers to arrange a relevant Health Impact Assessment or provide evidence of having appropriately liaised with local health care agencies or providers? They have not made provision to mitigate the burden that 1,500 or more new houses will make on a local NHS struggling to cope. The aim of WBC and the North-East Thatcham Development Consortium to improve access to the health service component of community infrastructure has not been met as they have not provided evidence for the provision of a viable primary care medical facility.

## 4. Education

The provision for education from Nursery, Early Years, through Infant to Secondary education is not clearly defined within the Local Plan Review (LPR). As there is no coherent end-to-end plan this therefore breaches the Council's obligations to provide education facilities for children. Without this provision, the Plan for a large new housing development is untenable.

There are no details in the LPR of the provision for Nursery or Early Years education. The provision for Primary school education is unclear and contradictory. There is no data or evidence on the planned numbers of schools or Form Entry requirements.

The current situation for secondary school students from Bucklebury is that they have a choice of either The Downs School or Kennet School as they are in the catchment area for both. Where schools are oversubscribed those children who live nearer to the school are given precedence. This means that children from the proposed NE Thatcham development would be able to opt for Kennet and those from Bucklebury would then be limited to The Downs. The LPR is inconsistent, incomplete and contradictory on the provision of secondary schooling in and around Thatcham.

West Berkshire Council is an education authority and as such it has a duty to make arrangements for suitable school provision. How this obligation will be met across all school years is not defined or evidenced in the LPR.

#### 5. Playing Fields Provision

Sports fields and playgrounds should be provided. However, these require flat ground. The only flat area of ground in the proposed site is that which is closest to the A4 and therefore in an area with the most traffic fumes. Also, there is no funding earmarked for these facilities. WBC should not assume schools, if they materialize, would open their grounds to the public. This is unlikely due to safeguarding and other concerns such as litter and animal waste which the school would be obliged to deal with before pupils could safely use the fields. The objective of WBC and the North-East Thatcham Development Consortium to provide sports fields has not been met as they have not provided evidence for funding or for a suitable location.

#### 6. Environment

There is bound to be collateral damage to the Bucklebury Plateau Biodiversity Opportunity Area and its ancient woodlands and heaths, in particular the Common. The management vision for Bucklebury Common is explicitly focused on not increasing human pressure on the fragile ecosystems they are working to restore and nurture. Siting a major greenfield development in the broader landscape setting of the North Wessex Downs AONB will forever impair enjoyment of the open countryside by local communities and cause detrimental impacts to legally protected wildlife known to be present on the site.

This whole plan is full of serious potential problems which have not been addressed. West Berkshire Council needs to go back to the drawing board and evaluate the long-term effects on the rural environment which is the bulk of their responsibility and the well-being of their current constituents, particularly those of us who choose to live in quiet, rural areas. Perhaps they could also address the issue of the 500 or so homes which are permanently empty in the district, and look at brown field sites for development rather than ruining part of the AONB which is such an important and precious resource.

Yours faithfully

Lesley McEwen

