

Minutes of a virtual meeting of Bucklebury Parish Council Planning Committee held via Zoom on Monday 25th January 2021 at 7.45pm.

Present: Cllr. J. Brims (Chairman); Cllr. B. Dickens; Cllr. P. Spours; Cllr. A. Hillerton; Cllr. D. Southgate; Cllr. L. Clarke; Cllr. H. Cairns; Cllr. F. MacCallum; Cllr. T. Slatford; Cllr. B. Unamba; District Cllr. G. Pask; Mrs. H. Pratt (Clerk).

Others: Approximately 58 parishioners.

Apologies: There were no apologies for absence.

Declarations of Interest:

There were no declarations of interest.

P1. **Overview.**

Cllr. Brims explained to those attending that the purpose of the meeting was to hear the views of parishioners on the Emerging Draft Local Plan Review and the proposal for 2,500 houses to the NE of Thatcham.

A summary of the process BPC has adopted in response to the consultation was explained, which has included creation of a Working Group to consider the PC's response, two separate zoom presentations for parishioners giving details on the proposal from a Bucklebury perspective and devoting this planning meeting to hearing parishioner's views.

A number of comments on social media and in letters to the PC have suggested that the result of the consultation process is already a 'done deal'. Comments have been made about the PC not leading in any clear direction. BPC has never regarded the result of the consultation as a 'done deal'. BPC wants to hear input from as many parishioners as possible.

The Working Group will meet this week to consider and prepare BPC's response. The draft produced will be presented at an Extraordinary meeting of BPC on Monday 1st February for the full council's endorsement. This will be a public meeting when parishioners will be able to make further comment.

BPC's main response will be to focus on the issues that affect Bucklebury Parish.

The views of parishioners fall into three broad categories: 1. Outright opposition, 2. Opposition, but with a focus on mitigation if the plan is adopted and 3. Those more sympathetic to the need.

The first two groups of parishioner are far more vocal and greater in number.

The following items within the plan are of most concern to parishioners:

1. Traffic through Upper Bucklebury (including Burdens Heath) and Chapel Row.
2. The inadequacy of the Traffic Impact Assessment.
3. The maintenance of a Strategic gap between Upper Bucklebury and Thatcham.
4. The protection of the new green space between the proposed new development and Upper Bucklebury.
5. The protection and impact on the existing AONB.
6. The protection and return to agricultural land of the gravel workings.
7. The impact of more users on Bucklebury Common.
8. The impact to wildlife on Bucklebury Common and in the space between Upper Bucklebury and Thatcham.
9. The potential inconvenience and effect particularly of noise on residents during construction.
10. Awareness of the Plan has been criticised in some quarters. BPC has advertised all of the meetings on the BPC website, the Bucklebury Community Facebook group (913 members), the Chapel Rovers Facebook group (126 members), WhatsApp groups where councillors are members and some Neighbourhood Watch groups. All present were

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encouraged to inform local people over whatever mediums possible.

There have been a few positive comments:

1. Benefit to businesses in Upper Bucklebury.
2. Possible increase in precept and S106/CIL monies due to the impact on Bucklebury Parish.

The more general comments have focused on:

1. Traffic on Floral Way.
2. The inadequacy of a Traffic Impact Assessment for the proposal as a whole.
3. The railway level crossing.
4. Lack of parking at Thatcham Station.
5. The lack of bio-diversity planning.
6. Thatcham has very few examples of hillside developments.
7. The infrastructure needs to be in place before development commences.
8. The lack of mention of health facilities or doctors surgeries.
9. The lack of plans for the centre of Thatcham.
10. The increase in population will change the small town feel of Thatcham.
11. The lack of plans for supermarkets.
12. Impact of the development on water runoff and the floor risk to lower parts of Thatcham.
13. The provision of utilities: water, electricity etc.

In addition to all of the above, a number of comments have been made on:

1. A flawed government process – BPC suggested that this is taken up with Laura Farris MP.
2. Consideration of alternative sites, some of which are covered in the plan.
3. Development on the flood plain.
4. The deadline for comments is Friday 5th February. The more people who respond, the bigger voice there is. The variation in the responses is also important.

It was emphasised that the meeting was to hear comments from parishioners and particularly any matters which have not been previously raised.

Cllr. Brims introduced District Cllr. Pask. District Cllr. Pask commented that living on Broad Lane, he is in the middle of Upper Bucklebury and has represented the Bucklebury Ward on WBC for many year. He is keen to hear the views of parishioners and answer any questions.

Cllr. Southgate gave a summary of the two Zoom presentations for the benefit of those not present at either of the presentations.

WBC are in the process of producing the Local Plan to cover the period through to 2037. A ‘call for sites’ across WBC was made, and the sites submitted were considered in the HEELA. WBC had been planning on a strategic site at Grazeley (south of Reading), but due to changes in the blast zone for Aldermaston and Burghfield, this site is no longer considered suitable for development. It was noted that the proposals for NE Thatcham (SP17) only propose building up to a height of 100m (approximately the height of Colthrop Farm). It is proposed that there will be a country park above 100m to the north of the site, acting as a buffer to Upper Bucklebury. The proposal includes one secondary school and two primary schools. A map showing expected traffic impacts is included in the report. It is proposed that only half of the houses will be built by 2037, with 40% of these being affordable.

The meeting was **closed** for members of the public to speak.

P2. **Bucklebury Parish Objection Group.**

Mr. Beeson introduced the Bucklebury Parish Objection group, set up as an informal group to fight the development. The group has been set up following a groundswell of people objecting to the proposal, concern over the apparent lack of action from BPC and a lack of urgency. Offers of help have not been taken up. A Facebook group has been formed which already has over 100 members. Flyers have been posted around Upper Bucklebury and delivered to the majority of homes in the

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parish. People have been encouraged to talk to their neighbours. Communication between BPC and parishioners was noted as an issue. The group has created a dedicated email address. An article is being drafted for the Newbury Weekly News.

Cllr. Brims responded that BPC will be ratifying its observations on the proposal at the Extraordinary meeting on 1st February. The consultation was originally sent to BPC in mid December and the first meeting of the working group was held in early January, followed by the two presentations. Cllr. Dickens is in regular contact with Thatcham Town Council about the proposal. The questions posed by Thatcham Town Council to WBC are being answered by District Cllr. Hilary Cole on YouTube. Cllr. Brims commented that there are no issues with parishioners leading a separate campaign against the development.

P3. Surface Runoff.

Concern was raised about surface runoff from 2,500 homes. Each property will have roof areas of approximately 420m² (including sheds and garages); where will the water go. It was noted that the developer is responsible for the runoff and SuDS (Sustainable Drainage System).

P4. Alternative Sites.

It was questioned why Greenham Common had not been considered as this is totally outside of the Aldermaston/Burghfield blast zone, is a brown field site and further from the AONB. Greenham Common is registered Common land and therefore protected.

Questions were asked why the development at Grazeley could not continue to go ahead; both Wokingham and Reading have maintained their plans to develop at Grazeley. If something was to happen, Thatcham is also within the blast zone.

It was questioned how much other sites have been considered; it was noted that there are other sites which are considered in the plan.

P5. Open Space.

The Pie chart showing land usage on the development shows over 50% being open space. It was questioned how this was calculated and whether it included private gardens.

P6. Timescales.

It was questioned whether it was possible to extend the closing date of the consultation due to lack of awareness. The consultation has been advertised in the NWN and via other mediums.

P7. Targets of Central Government.

Much of WBC is undevelopable (AONB or floodplain) and as a result questions were asked about whether WBC was enduring a disproportionate amount of new housing (approximately 520 – 570 new homes a year). This figure is set by Central Government. If WBC does not have a 5 year land supply for this number of new houses, there is a risk that planning inspectors will allow development where ever developers propose to put it. The number allocated to WBC has varied from approximately 800 to approximately 500 new homes per year. The number was reduced when there was an emphasis to put more new homes further north in the country. Cllr. Dickens commented that the current number was calculated before the COVID pandemic and before the UK left the EU. District Cllr. Pask responded that this is being questioned by WBC.

P8. North Wessex Downs AONB.

Rebecca Davies considers planning at the NWD AONB. Her email address is Rebeccadavies@northwessexdowns.org.uk.

P9. Working Group.

It was questioned whether comments from parishioners would be considered by the Working Group. Any comments should be sent to the Clerk for consideration.

Questions were asked about whether non parish councillors could be members of the Working Group; the Working Group will consider this at their next meeting.

P10. Traffic.

It was noted that the draft plan suggests a 22% increase in traffic towards Bucklebury. Some of this increased traffic will go on to Chapel Row, The Avenue and Bradfield, whilst some will go towards Cold Ash along Burdens Heath. The potential for an increase in speeding vehicles is a real concern. Questions were asked about how the traffic surveys had been carried out and it was felt that the

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information they contain is inadequate. The implications of COVID have dramatically change traffic patterns. Cllr. Dickens commented that the traffic work lacks evidence and much more detail is needed.

P11. **Common.**

Concerns were raised about the threat the development poses to the Common. With COVID, the Common has seen a dramatic increase in use. The Common is a public access area, but does still contain some wild areas which are home to wildlife. There are already issues with 4x4x, parking, dog fouling and litter/fly tipping. All of these issues are likely to increase with the development.

P12. **Biodiversity.**

The development will see a loss in biodiversity. There is no strategic review of wildlife in the Local Plan.

The meeting closed at 9.15pm.

Extra-ordinary meeting	Monday 1 st February 2021 – 7.45pm
Next BPC Meeting:	Monday 8 th February 2021 – 7.45pm.
Next Planning Committee Meeting:	Monday 22 nd February 2021 – 7.45pm.

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