

# Bucklebury Says No! Objections: Schools Provision

West Berkshire Council (WBC) LPR Review:  
Regulation 19 Consultation  
20<sup>th</sup> January – 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 2023

Specific Objections, No. 4:  
Schools Provision; Sports Fields Provision

## 1 Schools Provision

The provision for education from Nursery, Early Years, through Infant to Secondary education is **not clearly defined** within the Local Plan Review (LPR). 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.

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, not considered in the traffic plans and models in the LPR.

### **Pre-secondary School Provision:**

There are **no details** in the LPR of the provision for **Nursery or Early Years** education. Policy SP17 NE Thatcham Strategic Site Allocation, merely states that 'the site will provide Early Years provision'.

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 LPR proposes that the sum of £12 million be contributed by the developers to primary education. However, with no recent data available (the only data referenced is from 2011), it is impossible to assess if this is

sufficient. It also does not state the timing of this funding or school place provision. Clearly, schools need to be available before houses are built.

### **Secondary Education Provision:**

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. The latest LPR is in contradiction to the \*Supporting documentation. It proposes that the sum of £15 million be contributed by the developers to Secondary Education. There are **no details of the location of the land** to be provided and hence no possibility of assessing its suitability.

Please see the link below to **The Thatcham NE Development Plan 2020** (part of the LPR \*Supporting documentation):

[https://www.westberks.gov.uk/media/49799/Thatcham-Strategic-Growth-Study-Stage-3-Thatcham-Future/pdf/Thatcham\\_Strategic\\_Growth\\_Study\\_Stage\\_3.pdf?m=637910502456970000](https://www.westberks.gov.uk/media/49799/Thatcham-Strategic-Growth-Study-Stage-3-Thatcham-Future/pdf/Thatcham_Strategic_Growth_Study_Stage_3.pdf?m=637910502456970000)

The Thatcham NE development plan 2020, produced by David Locke Associates and Stantec on behalf of WBC, proposes funding for a 6-8FE (Form Entry) secondary school, half-funded by developer contribution.

**Government guidelines are that Secondary Schools with less than a 6FE are not sustainable.**

However, the Development Plan states that the **NE Thatcham development** (which proposed 2,500 houses), **is not sufficient to fill a 6–8 FE school**: Specifically :-

*5.18 Provision of a new secondary school in North East Thatcham is an essential part of enabling growth in the town. However, the scale of growth proposed is not sufficient on its own to fill a 6-8FE secondary school.*

*5.19 Secondary schools need to be of sufficient scale to make them sustainable and able to provide suitable facilities for their students, so it is not considered feasible for a new school to be smaller than 6FE.*

With an apparent 40% reduction in the housing allocation in the 2023 LPR (2022 to 2039) to 1500 houses, a secondary school simply cannot be sustainable in this location.

Earlier in this same Thatcham NE Development Plan it was noted that the education provision exercise was based on **WBDC data** on pupil yield from **a study in 2011**. Clearly the use of 11 year old data is inadequate. The Development Plan states:

*4.83 This study has not engaged in a detailed demographic prediction and modelling exercise to determine future primary and early years educational demand across the town, and has not attempted to predict the long-term capacities of existing schools. Inevitably educational provision will be examined in more detail as any development comes forward.*

The LPR Review to 2039, Policy SP17, now states that land (but not the Secondary school itself) will be provided for the development.

**In summary, it is therefore clear that the plan for secondary school provision is 'unsound' :**

- there is no satisfactory evidence of the number of pupils the school is to cater for;
- the location of a school is not clear;
- the number of Form Entries is not defined, but it is noted that anything less than a 6FE school is unsustainable;
- the timing of the funding is not clear; and
- there is no evidence that the proposed funding is sufficient to meet the Council's obligations to provide education.

## **Conclusion on Schooling :**

West Berkshire Council, as an education authority, 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**.

## **2 Sports Fields Provision**

The LPR talks of the provision of sports fields. This raises two issues not answered in the LPR:

- Sports fields 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.
- There is no funding earmarked for these facilities.

Although unclear, the LPR appears to assume that the school playing fields would also be available as Sports Fields. If the school itself is not viable, then the playing fields will not materialise. Additionally, many schools are reluctant to open their playing fields to the public due to safeguarding and other concerns.

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**.

Please could you inform friends and neighbours whom you think may not see this message.