

**Examination of West Berkshire Local Plan 2022-2039
Statements of Thatcham Town Council in response to
Inspector's questions in document IN6**

Matter 11: Economic development

This statement was approved by the meeting of Planning and Highways Committee of Thatcham Town Council on 12th March 2024, with the exception of paragraphs 11.10 & 11.11



Statements on Matter 11

11.5 Will policies ESA1 to ESA6 be effective in ensuring that each allocation is developed in a satisfactory manner?

Related parts of Regulation 19 representations: page 21

1. Thatcham Town Council only comments on Policy ESA1.
2. A full planning application has been submitted for this site by Thames Valley Police for a logistics hub:
23/02965/FULMAJ: The proposed Development is a Logistics Hub comprising a three-storey block of approximately 7,800 square metres Gross Internal Area (GIA) accommodating offices, laboratories and associated ancillary uses; a yard; a garage and storage building; a single-storey gatehouse; and associated internal access roads, car and cycle parking, landscaping, lighting, drainage and boundary treatments. | Land East of Goddards Road and 2 Gables Way Thatcham
3. The Planning and Highways Committee of the Town Council considered this application at its meeting on 13th February 2024, and resolved to support the application subject to three small design conditions.
4. Policy ESA1 notes that "The design and layout should also take into account the site's position as a gateway into Thatcham". We believe that this logistics hub, in conjunction with the proposed landscaping, will provide a fitting 'gateway' to the town – much more fitting than a likely alternative use for warehousing.
5. It is likely that this planning application will be determined in accordance with the current local plan. However, this application would not comply with two provisions of ESA1:
 - The floorspace is substantially less than the "approximately 20,400 square metres of employment floorspace" stipulated in ESA1 (probably still less than 10,000 sqm if the garage and gatehouse are included).
 - The access will be from Gables Way, rather than the A4.

We are surprised that this proposed logistics hub would not be in accordance with policy ESA1, and we suspect that the (remarkably precise) area of 20,400 sqm is based on one particular application within B2 and B8 uses – i.e. warehousing.

The Town Council therefore invited the Inspector to consider whether parameters a. and b. of Policy ESA1 are too prescriptive for the full range of potential B2 or B8 uses, and to suggest a main modification to address this.

11.9 Is the hierarchy of town centres identified in policy SP22 justified?

6. The Town Council agrees that it is appropriate to categorise the centre of Thatcham as a 'Town Centre' in the hierarchy of centres.

11.10 Are the boundaries to each town centre and primary shopping area defined on the policies map justified?

7. The Council has commissioned Hemingway Design to develop a Thatcham Town Centre Strategy, which has been made available to the Inspector as document EXAM9. The map in its report shows a substantially larger area than in the draft policies map. This area is appropriate for a study but is less suitable for a planning policy. It includes a significant number of houses on the periphery, but does not include some office premises at the southern end of The Broadway or business premises on the northern side of Chapel Street.
8. In attachment 1, we provide a map that we provided to Hemingway Design during its study. The Town Council invites the Inspector to consider this as a possible boundary for Thatcham Town Centre on the policies map. We would be happy to explain the rationale for this boundary (both for what it includes and what it excludes).
9. Crown Mead is a parade of shops adjacent to the A4 just to the west of the town centre, and quite closely connected to it. We invite the Inspector to consider whether it should also be marked on the policies map as a primary shopping area.

11.11 Is the approach in policy SP22 to considering development proposals within the town centres and primary shopping areas justified and consistent with national policy?

10. The Glossary of NPPF defines 'Town Centre' as:

"Area defined on the local authority's policies map, including the primary shopping area and areas predominantly occupied by main town centre uses within or adjacent to the primary shopping area",

and 'Main Town Centre Uses' as:

"Retail development (including warehouse clubs and factory outlet centres); leisure, entertainment and more intensive sport and recreation uses (including cinemas, restaurants, drive-through restaurants, bars and pubs, nightclubs, casinos, health and fitness centres, indoor bowling centres and bingo halls); offices; and arts, culture and tourism development (including theatres, museums, galleries and concert halls, hotels and conference facilities)."

11. Policy SP22 refers both to 'Class E' which includes most of these uses, and 'retail' which is only one of them.

12. Thatcham town centre has a mix of retail and other uses, including pubs, restaurants, takeaways, bookmakers and professional services. Some of the other 'main town centre uses' are not applicable to Thatcham, and a few are inappropriate (e.g. drive-through restaurants). The character of the town centre is a reflection of that mix.
13. The Town Council therefore believes that Policy SP22 needs to be clearer on the types of use to be supported and the types that will only be permitted exceptionally. This could in principle differ between town centres, reflecting their different characters.

DRAFT

Attachment 1: Policies Map: a possible boundary of Thatcham Town Centre

