

North East Thatcham masterplan

Initial Comments by Thatcham Town Council

approved by Full Council on 11th May 2026

The Town Council is relieved that the development of the Masterplan for North East Thatcham has finally started. However, we are disappointed that the time for its completion has been compressed, in particular, the deadline of 14th May for the initial round of comments.

The scope of the Masterplan is defined by the Local Plan Policy SP14. These comments are therefore structured to follow the headings in SP14, rather than the ‘discussion points’ provided at the stakeholder workshop or the online survey for residents. Many aspects of the design and layout of the site will mainly affect its future residents, rather than current residents of Thatcham and surrounding villages. We are therefore surprised that many of the questions in the online survey are on these aspects (which will inevitably be answered by current residents of Thatcham and not by future residents of the development), and we therefore wonder how meaningful and useful the results of the survey will be.

1 Role of Thatcham Town Council

Local Plan Policy SP14

The site will be masterplanned, prepared by the Council. It will be funded by the applicant and prepared in collaboration with the applicant, relevant town and parish councils, the community and other stakeholders.

The Town Council understands that the words “in collaboration with” require that there is a meaningful, ongoing and interactive relationship with the consultants developing the Masterplan (and not just an intermediary like DevComms Ltd) in the period before the formal consultation.

The Town Council wishes to play an active part in the development of the Masterplan. This document is just an initial response; we look forward to developing further with the consultants the ideas that it contains, especially those aspects that may benefit current local residents (such as the country park, healthcare and secondary education provision, local centres and improvements to active travel routes) or which may adversely impact them (such as road congestion).

Around 90% of the area of the site and of the development is within Thatcham Parish (the remainder is within Midgham Parish). The Town Council therefore has an interest in most aspects of the development, from the perspectives both of current residents of Thatcham and future residents of the development.

The period between the stakeholder meetings and 14th May (in practice, 11th May for the Town Council) has been insufficient to have full discussion among Councillors of the many aspects of the Masterplan. We therefore envisage making a further submission in around a month on some more detailed aspects, which may refine and amend comments in this document.

It should be noted that the legal framework for Town and parish Councils does not provide for delegated decision-making authority to Committee Chairmen or Office Holders. The timetable for collaboration therefore needs to allow for decisions by a meeting of the Council.

These comments focus on aspects of the Policy that we understand will be addressed by the Masterplan – and not on matters that are specified in Policy SP14 or which are described as for ‘Development proposals’ – which we understand to mean at the time of planning applications.

2 High Level Requirements for the NE Thatcham development

Local Plan Policy SP14

The area within the ‘red line’ is allocated for the delivery of a comprehensive, sustainable, low carbon, urban extension comprising of distinct neighbourhoods defined by their landscape and connected and contributing to Thatcham, and woven through with natural habitats and links.

The Masterplan will determine the location and extent of built development, land uses, green infrastructure including the extent of the green buffer, key access arrangements, community and other infrastructure.

Proposals must demonstrate how the provision of all infrastructure, services, open space and facilities will meet the needs of the development and be delivered in a timely and co-ordinated way across the whole site alongside the phased delivery of residential development.

The Town Council supports all of these objectives, with particular emphasis on:

- The need for the development to contribute to Thatcham
- The emphasis on natural habitats and links.
- The importance of the development being low carbon and sustainable.

We note that the site is naturally divided into three communities by Harts Hill Road and the ‘tongue’ of ancient woodland, and suggest that this is a working assumption for the Masterplan.

The word “determine” is crucial – the Masterplan must make final decisions on these matters – not vague generalisations that are open to later ‘reinterpretation’. This is particularly important if the proponents of the development (or developers to whom

they sell their interest) make separate planning applications for their portions of the site. In that case, it is imperative that each of those applications include those elements of infrastructure to be located in that portion of the site. Only in that way can residents of Thatcham be confident that the development as a whole will provide the infrastructure necessary to serve the enlarged population of Thatcham.

The words ‘timely and coordinated way’ are also crucial. It is imperative that infrastructure is delivered and in operation ahead of need – whether that need is for new residents of the development or because the capacity of existing provision in Thatcham is exceeded. This inherently means that many items of new infrastructure will be operating below their final capacity when first brought into service.

3 The importance of Thatcham as a single community

Local Plan Policy SP14

*Land as shown on the Policies Map is allocated for the delivery of a comprehensive, sustainable, low carbon, **urban extension** comprising of distinct neighbourhoods defined by their landscape and **connected and contributing to Thatcham** ... [our emphasis]*

Supporting text

6.56 The site will deliver a number of community benefits, both for the new residents of the site and for existing residents of Thatcham.

It is essential that both the design of the NE Thatcham development and the sequence of its build-out contribute to the development becoming an integral part of Thatcham and not a separate community – from the perspectives of both its residents and current residents of Thatcham. Important aspects include:

- Development should start from the west (adjacent to Floral Way), so that new communities are not isolated from Thatcham by open countryside or building sites during the construction period.
- The active travel routes should be completed early in development and not closed later for construction.
- The country park should be opened early in construction, at least in part, so that Thatcham residents can see a benefit from the development.
- The retail provision at the local centres should complement the town centre and not compete with it.
- Infrastructure that is provided for the wider Thatcham community should be available early in the construction of the development. Where this is provided by third parties (secondary education, primary healthcare, playing pitches etc), the

timing of their delivery should not be constrained by completion of essential supporting infrastructure (roads, sewers etc).

4 Landscape

Local Plan Policy SP14

The site lies in the setting of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and will be developed in accordance with policy SP2 and the Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment (2021) for the site.

The Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment for Land North East of Thatcham (David Lock Associates, 2021) contains a very curious statement in its introduction (paragraphs 2.11 and 2.12):

“The project brief requires the visual sensitivity of the study site to be considered as a single tract of landscape, and for the site not to be broken down into individual parcels of land. This is challenging, for whilst the site is clearly part of a south-facing, valley-side landscape, and might be described in that singular way, it contains local variations in visual character.

As a consequence, within the visual sensitivity attributes assigned to the overall site, there will inevitably be a range, and this study acknowledges that there will parts of the site with higher and lower sensitivity (and therefore lower and higher capacity) than the overall classification given, and it will be down to individual applicants to assess the visual sensitivity of specific parts of the site in relation to individual planning proposals, should the land be brought forward for development.”

The Town Council therefore believes that this document will be of little value in developing the layout of the site.

Local Plan Policy SP14

Development proposals for the site will be supported by a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) in accordance with the Landscape Institute Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd ed. 2013.

Supporting Text in Paragraph 6.50:

The area of green infrastructure shown on the indicative map takes into account the landscape work undertaken to support the TSGS, and uses the 105m contour to the west and central portion of the site, with the 100m contour to the east. The gas pipeline across the north of the site is required to have designated standoff areas and given its location to the north of the site development to the north of the pipeline is not considered appropriate. The final extent of the green infrastructure buffer will be informed by the LVIA, and other relevant background work carried out to support the Masterplan SPD.

The contours described in paragraph 6.50 have been derived from a substantial body of evidence in the evidence base for the Local Plan examination and elsewhere. The Town Council believes that this evidence would justify lower elevations. The LVIA required by the Local Plan is effectively a single professional (though also subjective) opinion. We believe that this assessment could not reasonably propose higher elevations without strong objective evidence, and we think it may well propose reduced elevations.

The Town Council requests the opportunity to review the draft LVIA, for its consistency with the existing evidence.

Local Plan Policy SP14

The site will provide a comprehensive network of green infrastructure and public open space across the whole site which will respond positively to the sensitivities of the landscape, protect and enhance landscape and biodiversity features of value within and around the site and make provision for biodiversity net gain.

It is important that the green infrastructure is designed as a coherent whole, and not simply a set of strips and patches to fill gaps left in the built development.

In the UK, around a third of households own a dog, and they will be particularly frequent users of green infrastructure and public open spaces. These therefore need to be designed with dogs in mind, as well as humans. The Hampshire County Council guidance document “Planning for Dog Ownership in New Developments”¹ provides helpful advice on this.

5 Homes

Local Plan Policy SP14

The site is allocated for the phased delivery of up to approximately 2,500 dwellings, with the final number of dwellings to be determined by the adopted Masterplan.

These dwellings will comprise an appropriate mix of housing types, tenures and sizes, and at least 40% of dwellings will be affordable housing and 3% of dwellings will be delivered via serviced custom/self-build plots.

There is a serious shortage of affordable housing in Thatcham, and more generally in West Berkshire. The Town Council is therefore determined that the requirement that at least 40% of dwellings are affordable will not be diluted in the Masterplan or in subsequent planning applications. The greatest shortage is in affordable housing for social rent, so this should form a substantial proportion of the 40% affordable housing. These should be to the same standard of build and finish as other housing, so that their tenants are not identified as ‘second-class’ residents.

¹ <https://documents.hants.gov.uk/ccbs/countryside/planningfordogownership.pdf>

A large proportion of dwellings on recent new developments in West Berkshire have been 'family homes', together with flats resulting from permitted development of former office premises. We therefore feel that the greatest need will be for houses suitable (in size and price) for first time buyers.

6 Local Centres

Local Plan Policy SP14

The site will provide a range of community facilities including local centres providing local retail facilities and small-scale business-use, including for community use.

As noted in section 2 above, the site is naturally divided into three communities by Harts Hill Road and the 'tongue' of ancient woodland, which are therefore to need three local centres. The competition-standard playing pitches will need to be located along the southern boundary of the site, where the land is flattest.

We envisage that most community facilities will be located in a local centre, or associated with the secondary school or playing pitches. These community facilities might include:

- GP Surgery (see also section 7 below)
- Dental Practice (see also section 7 below)
- Pharmacy (see also section 7 below)
- Opticians (see also section 7 below)
- Community Halls (see also section 9 below)
- Sports pitches (see section 15 below)
- Indoor sports facilities (see section 10 below)
- A performance space (see section 9 below)
- A building for youth organisations (Scouts/Guides etc)
- Facilities for young people (see below)
- Café (see sections 7 and 11 below)
- A day centre (see section 7 below)

We are content for Bradley Moore Square to be the local centre for the west of the development. We suggest that one of the other local centres has the majority of the facilities that serve the whole development or the wider area, while the other local centre has a convenience store and perhaps a few other retail premises to serve that community. Our initial suggestion is that the major local centre is located adjacent to Colthrop Manor.

We encourage the masterplan to consider whether some of the buildings at Siege Cross Farm and Colthrop Manor have the potential to become community facilities.

It is important that the development includes facilities for young people. We leave it to the young people themselves to suggest what facilities they would value most – but the

Masterplan should not be prescriptive at this stage. Their location needs to be sensitively chosen, so that they are convenient for the young people but do not give rise to the perception of nuisance by neighbours.

We do not understand the term “small-scale business-use” in the context of local centres. This term is not defined in Policy SP14 or elsewhere in the Local Plan, and seems at odds with the definition of “business uses” in paragraph 7.1. We assume that the retail premises in the local centres would generally be planning use class F2:

“Local Community: use as a shop mostly selling essential goods, including food, to visiting members of the public in circumstances where the shop’s premises cover an area not more than 280 metres square, and there is no other such facility within 1000 metre radius of the shop’s location”

Many of the uses within Class E are inappropriate for a local centre or should be concentrated in the town centre – such as professional and financial services (see section 3 above).

7 Primary Healthcare

Local Plan Policy SP14

The site will provide a range of community facilities including:

Primary Healthcare provision and associated infrastructure, which is operationally and financially viable, the details of which should be agreed with the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB-ICB) or other such appropriate body, taking into account the feasibility study carried out by BOB-ICB. Further detailed feasibility work should be carried out at the applicant's expense in collaboration with BOB-ICB;

NOTE: BOBICB has become Thames Valley ICB

We note that the Government definition of Primary Care includes GPs, dentists, opticians and pharmacies.

The evidence provided at the Regulation 19 consultation and Examination demonstrated that the population of the development will be too small to support by itself a viable GP surgery. The existing Thatcham GP practices (Thatcham Medical Practice and Burdwood Surgery) are already operating at full capacity, without space to expand on their sites. The surgery at Chapel Row would be extremely inconvenient for NE Thatcham residents. It is therefore essential that the NE Thatcham development results in the creation of additional GP surgery capacity.

We therefore welcome the interest shown by the Burdwood Surgery in relocating to larger premises on this site. The best location for this surgery on the development would be at the larger of the local centres (adjacent to Colthrop Manor – see section 6 above),

where there could also be a pharmacy, dentist and café – and shared car parking spaces.

An important consideration for the relocation of a GP surgery to the NE Thatcham development is its accessibility to its existing patients. This could be provided through the use of autonomous vehicles (see section 17 below – the cycle track across the Siege Cross open space might provide a route to the existing surgery and beyond to the Kennet Heath estate).

As pharmacies and dentists are commercial businesses, it is difficult to mandate them through planning policy. However, the design of the local centre and the individual retail premises should provide suitable locations for these businesses.

8 Early years and primary school provision

Local Plan Policy SP14

The site will provide ... early years and primary school provision on site with land to be provided and build costs to be met by the applicant.

West Berkshire Council needs to clarify whether it envisages that the early years provision will be associated with primary provision or provided commercially, as this might affect the location of the land to be provided.

These sites need to be centrally located to their expected catchment areas, to maximise the proportion of pupils who can walk. As catchment areas can change over time, consideration should also be given to the possibility of some children from the existing Thatcham developments also attending these schools.

9 Secondary school and SEND provision

Local Plan Policy SP14

The site will provide ... Secondary school and SEND provision, including the provision of land and a financial contribution. The nature and cost of the required provision will be informed by a feasibility study, undertaken at the applicants' expense and prepared in collaboration with the Council and local stakeholders.

It is already apparent that this development will not justify a complete new secondary school, which we understand DfE guidance would require to have around eight forms of entry. Therefore, the only viable options appear to be a second campus for Kennet School (possibly for its sixth form) or a complete relocation of Kennet School to a site on the development.

For both of these options, the majority of pupils attending the school on this site will be from the current area of Thatcham, and it needs to have good connections for active

travel. The Town Council therefore believes that the location for the secondary school should be at the south west corner of the site.

At one of the stakeholder meetings, we were informed that it is likely that planning policy could only justify the provision of land for the minimum size of viable secondary school (under DfE current policy around 8-form entry). However, Kennet School is already larger than this, and might need to grow to 12-form entry to accommodate pupils from the development. The land reserved for secondary education provision may therefore by itself be insufficient for a full relocation of Kennet School.

However, if Kennet School relocated to a new site on NE Thatcham, it would vacate its existing site. The playing fields on that site form part of the Thatcham flood prevention scheme, and could therefore not be used for housing or other development. We therefore suggest that some of the public playing pitches on the NE Thatcham development are located adjacent to the land reserved for secondary education provision. If Kennet School did relocate to NE Thatcham, these pitches could be ‘swapped’ for the pitches on the current school site.

We hope that the secondary school will provide opportunities to share its facilities with the wider community. However, this cannot be mandated through planning policy (and in any case, the secondary school would be a separate planning application to the development). The relative timing of availability of secondary provision to development of the NE Thatcham site will also be uncertain. The facilities that might be provided by the school to the wider community therefore cannot be counted towards the social infrastructure needed to be provided by the development.

At present, the only performance space² in Thatcham is the main hall of Kennet School, which has limited availability for community use. We therefore suggest that the Masterplan should include provision of a site adjacent to the secondary school for a performance space. The use could be shared by the school and the community. A good model for this is Arlington Arts Centre at Mary Hare School.

We note that these three adjacent uses could share car parking provision, as they have different days and times of peak use: school (weekday daytime for staff); playing pitches (weekends) and performance space (evenings).

10 Community indoor facilities

Local Plan Policy SP14

The site will provide community indoor facility to be used for sport and community uses with a variety of room sizes.

² By ‘performance space, we mean a hall and associated rooms that is equipped for theatrical and music performances and films, with sufficient height for retractable raked seating and theatre lighting.

The supporting text to the Policy states: *“There may be opportunities for community infrastructure to be provided off site, or for improvements to existing services or facilities to be made as a result of the development.”*

The Town Council manages two public halls in Thatcham and has trusteeships for several more. In our experience the hirers of these halls draw participants from across the town and beyond. We therefore do not believe that a new public hall ‘for hire’ is needed specifically to serve the development.

The development does, however, provide an opportunity to provide public buildings for a more focussed purpose – for example, attached to the café (which could then provide catering), a centre for a particular community group or specifically for youth groups.

We are doubtful that an indoor sports centre or library of the size justified by the development would be viable, given the fixed staffing and other overheads of such facilities. We would therefore prefer that these needs are fulfilled through Section 106 contributions for improvements to the Kennet Leisure Centre and Thatcham Library.

In section 9 above, we suggest that a performance space for community use could be shared with the secondary school.

11 Country Park

Local Plan Policy SP14

The site will provide a band of green infrastructure/new community park across the higher land on the northern part of the allocation (as shown on the indicative map) to be retained outside the settlement boundary. This is to create a buffer between the built development of the allocation and the adjoining countryside and the village of Upper Bucklebury to the north. The precise nature of the band of GI is to be informed by a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment and the masterplanning process, having regard to the location of the site within the setting of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.

The supporting text to the Policy states:

“6.5.3 It is anticipated that approximately half of the site will be set aside as green infrastructure, to serve the new population at North East Thatcham and be retained in perpetuity, taking into account the site’s location within the setting of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape. An area, across the north of the site, will provide a buffer between the new development and the existing community of Upper Bucklebury to the north and comprise an extensive area of multi-functional green space, which will protect ancient woodland and areas of ecological value while providing opportunities for informal recreation. In addition, green infrastructure will be provided within the areas of built development. Built development and the green infrastructure buffer should respond to the findings of the LVIA and ensure an appropriate form of development

taking into account the constraints of the site, including below ground infrastructure. Areas of isolated development should be avoided.

6.54 The area of green infrastructure shown on the indicative map takes into account the landscape work undertaken to support the TSGS, and uses the 105m contour to the west and central portion of the site, with the 100m contour to the east. The gas pipeline across the north of the site is required to have designated standoff areas and given its location to the north of the site development to the north of the pipeline is not considered appropriate.”

These two paragraphs eloquently describe the expectations of the Town Council on what the Country Park will provide.

The area of the country park is divided into three parts by Harts Hill Road and the ‘tongue’ of ancient woodland known as Long Grove Copse. It should include a number of circular walks, with a surface suitable for wheelchairs and buggies and use in all weathers. To provide some longer walks, it is highly desirable that the eastern and central sections are linked together. There is already an avenue through the copse on the line of the gas pipeline, and we urge the site proponents to seek permission from the landowner of the copse for this to form part of the country park path network. A second path could follow the landscape buffer around the boundary of the copse. The top of the bridleway is a good viewpoint.

We suggest that one of the local centres is located on the boundary of the country park – and we suggest that the most suitable location for this might be adjacent to Colthrop Manor. The facilities of this local centre, including a café, convenience store and car parking, could then be shared by local residents and visitors to the country park.

Harts Hill Road provides a barrier between the western and central portions of the country park. The western portion could then have a different character to the other parts. There needs to be safe access for pedestrians across Harts Hill Road. However, given the character of this road, it should not create a strong ‘desire line’. There should be good access to this portion of the country park from the development, from public footpath THAT/6 and from the paths in The Plantation.

The Town Council has a strong preference for the ownership of the country park to be transferred to a public or public benefit body, such as a local authority or Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), which would then manage it with some financial contribution from the development. Given that the country park provides the setting of the National Landscape, a public body might be eligible for grants that would not be available to a commercial management company.

The design and planting of the country park should be sympathetic to the landscape and vegetation of the locality prior to arable farming (historically, they may have been different landscapes over time, which might be reflected in different parts of the site).

12 Active travel

Local Plan Policy SP14

Measures will be included to improve accessibility by, and encourage use of, sustainable transport modes.

Development proposals for the site will be supported by a Transport Assessment and Travel Plan to provide detail on how this will be achieved, including:

Active travel improvements on routes between the site, Thatcham town centre and the railway station;

The provision of active travel is important, to reduce the impact of the development on traffic congestion at peak hours. Some of the routes have already been studied in the LCWIP, and substantial challenges have been identified – most notably Chapel Street.

However, the propensity to use active travel is reduced in winter and when it is raining. We have therefore suggested deploying small autonomous vehicles, which might be able to share cycle paths (see section 17 below).

The layout of the development should have cycle paths separated from roads for major routes, and should encourage the use of the cycle path along Floral Way and Tull Way for journeys to Newbury.

The main active travel routes to the station should have the crossing of the A4 controlled by traffic lights.

Bridleway THAT/3 might form part of an active travel route from Upper Bucklebury to a local centre in the development and to the station.

We would be happy to share our local experience and knowledge with the consultant undertaking the Transport Assessment.

13 Public Rights of Way and Leisure routes

Local Plan Policy SP14

This provision will include:

- *greenways which connect through the site and facilitate connectivity to the wider landscape and the existing Public Rights of Way network;*
- *A Public Rights of Way Strategy to demonstrate how existing Public Rights of Way will be protected and enhanced and how new ones will be established, including bridleway links and safe crossing points;*

The site is crossed by four public rights of way – one bridleway (THAT/3) and three public footpaths (THAT/1, THAT/2 and THAT/6). All of these provide important connectivity from Thatcham to the countryside, and must be retained. They should where possible be embedded within green infrastructure to maintain their setting. Under no circumstance should they be absorbed into the footway of a street (as, for example, happened with PROW THAT/8/3 on Cowslip Crescent)

The site should also provide connectivity to THAT/8, the permissive path that runs alongside Harts Hill Road and passes between Keepers Cottage and Lincoln View, and paths that go through The Plantation from Foxglove Way to Floral Way (these are claimed public rights of way, currently under assessment).

Bridleway THAT/3 might form part of the active travel network from the development to the Colthrop industrial estate and the station. Its junction with the A4 should therefore not also become a vehicular access point to the development. It might also form a route for active travel from Upper Bucklebury.

The development will require walking and cycling routes for active travel and paths in the country park. The active travel routes should be adopted by West Berkshire Council as highways, but we do not see the need for them to be dedicated as public rights of way.

14 Green Infrastructure within developed area

Local Plan Policy SP14

The site will provide green infrastructure and public open space within the developed parts of the site in addition to the community park.

The green infrastructure within the development needs to respond to and preserve the existing natural features, including major trees, hedgerows and water courses. The public rights of way and major active travel routes should be embedded within green infrastructure, rather than bounded by fencing.

The Town Council does not consider swales and SuDS basins to constitute green infrastructure unless they are attractive in their own right.

15 Sports provision

Local Plan Policy SP14

The site will provide outdoor formal and informal sports pitches and areas.

The West Berkshire playing pitch strategy has identified a shortfall in provision of playing pitches for all of the major team sports. The main sports ground for Thatcham is at Henwick Worthy at the western end of the town. West Berkshire Council has commissioned a masterplan for this site, which we understand will define priorities for

its future. These two documents together should define the priority for pitches for different sports on the development.

The pitches for formal competition games will need to be on reasonably level ground, which is mostly at the south of the site alongside the A4. The Exfolum oil pipeline runs across this area, which will prevent most other types of development. We have suggested that some of these pitches should be adjacent to the site reserved for a secondary school, to provide flexibility for future decisions on this provision (see section 9 above). We assume that the formal sports pitches will be managed by West Berkshire Council.

League teams generally draw players from quite a wide area, and away teams will travel from another town. Both will bring spectators. The sports pitches therefore need ample car parking, and should be located so that any overflow does not block residential streets.

Informal pitches are generally smaller, with less requirement to be level. They should be distributed across the development so that they are convenient for residents.

Some sports are frequently run by commercial organisations or members' clubs – including Padel and bowls. The masterplan should include provision of land for private development of facilities for such sports.

16 Preservation of existing green infrastructure and biodiversity

Local Plan Policy SP14

This provision will include:

- *Conservation of the areas of ancient woodland by providing appropriate buffers between the development and the ancient woodland;*
- *Enhancements for biodiversity*

Our clear preference is for biodiversity net gain to be delivered on-site (rather than by trading with a distant location). However, this should not be at the expense of providing a country park and other green infrastructure that is an attractive destination for residents of the development and the wider local community.

We would welcome the creation of a small lake on the development. This would be best located within the country park, although we recognise the challenges of the sloping ground and the need for a reliable source of water.

17 Transport

Local Plan Policy SP14

Measures will be included to improve accessibility by, and encourage use of, sustainable transport modes.

Development proposals for the site will be supported by a Transport Assessment and Travel Plan to provide detail on how this will be achieved, including:

Multiple access points and a vehicular through route;

Sustainable transport through routes;

Mitigation of the development's impacts on the highways network with improvements to existing junctions where they are needed and delivery of new access points for all forms of movement and transport to the site at locations to be agreed with the planning authority;

How adverse impacts on air quality will be minimised; and

Promotion and encouragement of sustainable modes of travel.

Access Points and vehicular through route

The impact of the development on traffic congestion on the A4, Floral Way and other routes in Thatcham is a major concern for local residents. The location and design of the access points therefore need to minimise the impact on existing local residents.

We note with concern the comments of the WBC Highways Engineer on the impact of the much smaller development at Henwick Park (25/00278/FULMAJ) on the Cold Ash Hill roundabout, and what this foretells for the much larger North East Thatcham development.

It is likely that a significant proportion of the pupils of the secondary school will be transported by car. We therefore suggest that the vehicular through route passes by an entrance to the school, with adequate provision of laybys for drop-off and pick-up.

Public Transport

We are doubtful that the existing Jet Black and 1A/1C bus routes could be extended to run through the development without unreasonably increasing journey times for existing users. We are also doubtful that a dedicated bus service for the development would be economically viable without a substantial subsidy.

Given the proposed trajectory for development, we envisage that public transport provision might be required from about 2035. By that time, it is likely that autonomous vehicles will be a mature technology, especially for short journeys on defined routes. These would probably be small vehicles, which would enable a service to be more frequent (and potentially on demand) than a bus service requiring a driver.

We therefore suggest that a brief study is undertaken in parallel with the masterplan, to consider the potential for autonomous vehicles to provide public transport services for North East Thatcham. This might consider:

- The suitability of routes to Thatcham Station, the town centre, Colthrop industrial estate and potentially Burdwood/Kennet Heath (for patients of Burdwood Surgery, should it decide to relocate to North East Thatcham).

- The type of autonomous vehicle (number of passengers, vehicle speed etc)
- On the development, the extent to which autonomous vehicles should use highways, active travel routes or dedicated routes.
- The capacity required to service peak demand for commuters and workers.
- Associated infrastructure requirements on the development

Impact on the highways network

Thatcham residents remain very concerned about the impact of the development on congestion on the A4 and delays at the level crossing. The transport assessment needs to be undertaken as part of the Masterplan, to verify that the proposed access points do not unduly increase congestion on the A4, Floral Way and surrounding roads (including roads in neighbouring parishes). The delays at the level crossing need to be assessed for current and projected levels of rail traffic (including freight).

Air Quality

We assume that this will be inherently resolved on-site through the migration to electric vehicles and more widely through renewable energy to recharge them.

18 Heritage

Local Plan Policy SP14

Development proposals for the site will be supported by a Historic Environment Strategy in accordance with policy SP9 to demonstrate how the site's historical development, archaeological remains and historic buildings and parkland will inform the scheme and help to create a sense of place.

Colthrop Manor and Siege Cross Farm each include a Grade 2 listed barn and a period farmhouse. Both farmsteads also have modern agricultural buildings. The Siege Cross barn has approved change of use to B1/B8, but the Colthrop Manor barn has not, and appears to be still used for agricultural purposes.

The sites of both farmsteads are within the area of the development, but are excluded from its 'red line area' (presumably because they have different legal ownership). They are therefore outside of the formal remit of the Masterplan, but it will still need to consider them in order to provide a setting for them and a sense of place.

In section 6 above, we suggest that Colthrop Manor is a suitable location for a local centre and 'set off point' for the country park. The barn and other farm buildings would contribute to its sense of place, and the design of the local centre should facilitate the barn and other farm buildings and their future use being integrated into the local centre and the development.

19 Development proposals

The following elements of Policy SP 14 all relate to “Development proposals”, which appears to mean planning applications. We assume that they will therefore be largely addressed at that stage, and not (at least in any detail) in the masterplan. The following elements are particularly important to the Town Council:

Development proposals for the site will be supported by a Transport Assessment ... and Mitigation of the development's impacts on the highways network (though we believe that this assessment is needed for the Masterplan)

Flooding and Water Environment: Development proposals for the site will be supported by a Flood Risk Assessment ...

Sustainability: for the site will be supported by an Energy Statement or a detailed energy section with the Sustainability Statement ...

Biodiversity: Development proposals for the site will be supported by a Biodiversity Strategy ...

We believe that biodiversity requirements should be met within the development or in immediately adjacent locations, and not by ‘buying credits’ for completely different locations.

Although not mentioned in the Local Plan in this context, the ability of Thames Water to provide capacity for treatment of sewage from the development is a major concern to residents, which must be addressed at an appropriate stage within the planning process.