

Planning and Highways Committee, 6th May 2025

Henwick Park Full Planning Application

Thatcham Town Council response to Application 25/00278/FULMAJ: Full planning application for 236 dwellings (Use Class C3) public open space including parkland and equipped play areas; access from Bowling Green Road and Cold Ash Hill; internal highways and vehicle parking; landscaping; sustainable drainage systems; and associated infrastructure.

Resolved: Objection, on the following grounds.

Reasons for Objection:

1) Risk of Flooding

Thatcham suffered serious flooding in 2007, caused largely by water running off the hills to the north, including the site of this application. Since then, the town has been fortunate to receive funding for a flood alleviation scheme to prevent a recurrence. The Town Council has serious concerns about any development that might compromise these schemes or create new sources of flooding.

In March 2025, the Environment Agency updated its Flood Risk Map for Planning, which now shows parts of the site to be in Flood Zones 2 and 3. The Flood Risk and Drainage Assessment that forms part of the application does not address this.

The Town Council shares the concerns of the West Berkshire Council LLFA/SuDS team about the substantial shortcomings of the Flood Risk and Drainage Assessment, and support their conclusion that the application should be refused on this basis.

In addition, we share the concerns expressed by the Flood Warden for Cold Ash, based on personal observation of surface water flooding and the risk of construction work releasing underground aquifers.

We also share the concerns of Ardent, the Consulting Engineers who designed the flood attenuation schemes on the site, of the potential impact of the development on their effectiveness.

None of these matters have been adequately considered by the Flood Risk and Drainage Assessment.

Any construction work on this site will give rise to temporary changes in level, which could alter the flow of water and give rise to temporary risk of flooding. The Flood Risk and Drainage Assessment therefore must consider both the final topography of the proposed development and any temporary changes during construction. Any planning approval for this site must include stringent conditions to ensure that there is no temporary risk of flooding.

2) Impact on the North Wessex Downs National Landscape

As recognised in the Design and Access statement, this site is within the setting of the North Wessex Downs AONB (now known as the North Wessex Downs National Landscape).

Section 85(A1) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CroW) states “In exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty in England, a relevant authority [which includes West Berkshire Council as Planning Authority] must seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty.” This provision was added by the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023¹.

The setting of the National Landscape is the area adjacent to it that might affect the statutory purpose of the AONB. It follows that a planning authority when considering an application for development within the setting of an AONB must seek to ensure that the development, to the extent that it affects the AONB, conserves and enhances its natural beauty. DEFRA has produced guidance on this ².

Appendix E of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, titled ‘National Landscape Policy Context’ does not refer to CroW or to the Guidance. The Design and Access Statement refers to a Statement of Common Ground with the Council relating to the landscape impact of a previous proposal for development. However, this predates the 2023 addition to CroW, so is no longer relevant.

The application therefore does not provide the evidence that the Council requires before potentially granting approval, that it would be fulfilling its statutory under CroW to “seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB”.

3) Travel Plan

The travel plan is out of date, because the 41 WBC Connect bus route has been discontinued and replaced by West Berkshire Community Connect, which is intended by residents of villages. The report does not mention that the first bus on the 1C bus route is not until around 9am and the last bus on the 1A route is at around 6pm, so they cannot be used by many workers.

¹ We are aware that Paragraph 189 of NPPF (Dec 2024) states that “Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and National Landscapes which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues.” and “... development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas.” However, this paragraph has not been amended since the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 became law. The Act therefore takes precedence.

² See DEFRA Guidance for relevant authorities on seeking to further the purposes of Protected Landscapes: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-protected-landscapes-duty/guidance-for-relevant-authorities-on-seeking-to-further-the-purposes-of-protected-landscapes#the-setting-of-protected-landscapes>