

North East Thatcham: Requested Additions to the Masterplan SPD

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The following are specific requests for inclusion in the North East Thatcham Masterplan Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), currently in early-stage public consultation with a deadline of 14 May 2026. Each point is self-contained and grounded in the council's own commissioned evidence or adopted policy.

The development could increase Thatcham's population by around a quarter, depending on occupancy assumptions and the population boundary used. These requests are framed in two ways: first, as infrastructure safeguards that must be in place before homes are occupied; and second, as quality standards that should make the development something genuinely worth building: a new part of Thatcham where residents can meet daily needs within a short walk or cycle, find local employment and live in well-designed homes on streets that work for people first. The goal is not to mitigate a poor development but to insist on a good one.

1. Appropriate Phasing

- The SPD should state that the final dwelling count will be determined by infrastructure capacity, not by the 2,500 maximum in the Local Plan. If the transport, sewage, healthcare and employment evidence cannot support 2,500 homes, the SPD must provide for a lower figure.
- The council's own evidence indicates approximately 1,760 homes are anticipated within the plan period to 2041 [1]. The SPD should not plan infrastructure, phasing or density on the assumption that the full 2,500 will be built before that date.
- Employment floorspace must be delivered in step with housing phases. The council's own commissioned evidence shows that Thatcham has a limited local employment base relative to nearby centres and that significant out-commuting occurs, including toward Reading and London [5][6]; without binding employment provision the development becomes a dormitory. If employment targets are not met, subsequent housing phases should not proceed.

2. Infrastructure Readiness

- The SPD should require a new road and active travel crossing of the railway and the Kennet and Avon Canal, secured as a funded S106 obligation before any phase that would materially increase pressure at Thatcham level crossing. A feasible solution has been demonstrated: the Colthrop Village Consortium demonstrated a worked-up, costed bridge solution for this corridor [19], and a West Berkshire Council and Network Rail Statement of Common Ground of March 2024 confirmed that the North East Thatcham development would increase crossing traffic even with mitigation, with Network Rail stating full support for a bridge. Thatcham cannot grow by around a quarter and remain dependent on a Victorian level crossing as its only southbound road connection. The SPD must require a funded delivery commitment with a clear occupation trigger.
- No dwelling in any phase should be occupied unless Thames Water has confirmed in writing that sufficient wastewater treatment capacity is operational for that phase,

including any required upgrades to Thatcham or Woolhampton works. Formal representations to the Local Plan examination recorded both works at full capacity with significant 24-hour tankering ongoing at Woolhampton throughout winter 2024/25 [18]. Phased written confirmation is the only mechanism that prevents the developer from relying on a blanket upfront assurance that does not reflect actual network headroom at the time of occupation.

- A formal Rail Capacity Assessment, commissioned with input from GWR and Network Rail, should be published before any phase expected to generate significant additional rail demand is permitted to proceed. Thatcham station has around 55 car parking spaces, the Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group records September, November and December 2024 as full line blockades [9], and the council's own transport model found that a new bus to the station would reduce car use from the site by only 2.5 per cent [4]. GWR-wide ORR data confirm significant network reliability issues [7][8]; the Assessment must address not just station access but whether line capacity and timetable pathways can absorb the additional demand, and if so on what timescale.
- No dwelling in any phase should be occupied until NHS Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB) has confirmed in writing that GP and pharmacy capacity sufficient for that phase is operational. Thatcham Medical Practice's own examination submission states it already has 18,632 registered patients and that the 450 square metre satellite surgery proposed in the policy would not be financially viable and could not meet GMS contract requirements [20]. Bucklebury Parish Council's healthcare analysis records the two Thatcham surgeries at approximately 27,800 patients and just under 2,000 patients per GP, with no realistic prospect of a new practice being established locally [21]. West Berkshire has been reported by local representatives to have very low pharmacy provision per head.
- The SPD should explain how the phasing of greenfield development at North East Thatcham has taken account of brownfield opportunities within the expanded Thatcham settlement boundary, including the Colthrop Industrial Estate, which the Inspector brought within that boundary [1]. This is consistent with the NPPF's priority for effective use of previously developed land, and with the Inspector's recognition of Colthrop's brownfield character. Where brownfield capacity is available and deliverable, the SPD should demonstrate why greenfield phases are proposed to proceed in parallel rather than after it.
- The SPD must define a local centre with a binding minimum commercial and community floorspace, require it to be delivered early in the phasing programme, and specify the mix of uses it must contain, including retail, workspace and community facilities. A vague aspiration for 'local centres' without minimum floorspace, required uses or a delivery trigger risks producing a handful of convenience services rather than a genuine community hub. Thatcham already has an example of this pattern in Bradley Moore Square, which despite serving a large residential area offers limited retail and no meaningful employment or community workspace. The SPD should ensure North East Thatcham does not repeat it. The TCPA's 20-minute neighbourhood guidance and NPPF paragraphs 86 to 90 both support the principle that new communities should be able to meet daily needs locally; the SPD should give this principle enforceable content.
- New bus services connecting the development to Thatcham town centre and the railway station should operate at a minimum frequency of every 15 to 20 minutes during peak hours from first occupation, with S106 funding secured for a sufficient operating period to establish the routes before commercial viability is tested. Frequency determines whether residents use public transport or default to the car; a bus that arrives once an hour will not change behaviour. At Cranbrook in Devon,

buses were running before the first residents arrived and frequency was written into the S106; the result is one of the highest public transport modal shares of any new settlement in the South West.

- The SPD must address school provision in Thatcham-specific terms. Kennet School is currently consulting on cutting its annual intake from 300 to 270 from 2027 because the number of primary-age children locally has fallen [22]. The arrival of 2,500 new family homes is likely to reverse that trend and generate substantial secondary demand within a decade. The SPD must specify a binding occupation trigger beyond which no further dwellings may be occupied until the new on-site secondary school or a confirmed funded expansion of Kennet is operational. For primary provision, S106 education contributions should also be available to existing Thatcham schools during the transition period, not reserved exclusively for new on-site schools.

3. Reduce Countryside and Environmental Impact

- The SPD should start from a precautionary 50 metre ancient woodland buffer across the whole site and require any reduction to be justified by site-specific ecological evidence. Natural England's standing advice sets 15 metres as an absolute minimum and advises that larger buffers may be required depending on site-specific impacts [14]. Given the scale of this allocation and its proximity to ancient woodland, 50 metres is the appropriate precautionary starting point.
- No ancient or veteran trees within the site boundary should be removed. An independent arboricultural survey should be required before the masterplan layout is finalised, so that the design is tree-led rather than treating mature-tree loss as acceptable mitigation. Local examples such as the eastern portion of Dunstan Park in Thatcham show how mature trees can be successfully integrated into large residential schemes; the SPD should require the North East Thatcham layout to follow that approach.
- The SPD should adopt a minimum 30 per cent tree canopy cover target across the whole site, maintained in perpetuity and secured through the design code and planning conditions. This is consistent with the Trees and Design Action Group's guidance on trees in new developments and with canopy targets increasingly adopted in strategic housing allocations across England.
- The SPD should set a locally justified biodiversity net gain target significantly above the statutory minimum of 10 per cent, reflecting the site's scale, greenfield character, ancient woodland context and relationship to the North Wessex Downs National Landscape [15]. A site of this significance should not simply satisfy the minimum legal requirement.
- The masterplan website confirms that a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment is currently underway. The SPD should require the LVIA findings to be published in full as part of the SPD evidence base before the layout is fixed, and should demonstrate how the findings have directly informed the layout, density, landscape buffers and edge treatment in relation to the North Wessex Downs National Landscape [15]. Commissioning the assessment is not sufficient; the SPD must show it has been acted upon.
- Council consultation material indicates that approximately 50 per cent of the site is expected to comprise green infrastructure, including a community park [16]. The SPD should make this a binding requirement rather than an aspiration, secured through the design code and S106.

4. Reduce Impact on the Town

- The SPD should require all dwellings to meet the Future Homes Standard unless a specific phase is demonstrably entitled to transitional treatment under Building Regulations, and should prevent artificial early commencement designed solely to preserve weaker transitional standards. The standard comes into force on 24 March 2027; because transitional arrangements apply to individual buildings rather than whole sites, developers cannot protect an entire scheme through a small number of early applications [12]. Both West Berkshire Council and Thatcham Town Council have declared 2030 net zero commitments. Goldsmith Street, Norwich [12] demonstrates that Passivhaus standard is achievable for affordable housing at scale.
- All dwellings should be required to meet the Nationally Described Space Standards, and the design code should require tenure-blind design throughout, meaning affordable homes must be indistinguishable in external appearance and quality of public realm from market homes. Given that 40 per cent of the development will be affordable housing, the design code must ensure that the built quality and street environment of affordable tenures matches that of the wider development. Schemes such as Goldsmith Street in Norwich [12] and Accordia in Cambridge demonstrate that this is achievable and produces significantly better outcomes for all residents.
- Internal streets should be designed pedestrian-first, with low speeds achieved through geometry rather than signage: tight radii, raised tables at junctions, continuous footways and tree-lined carriageways. Poundbury in Dorset and Upton in Northamptonshire both demonstrate that geometry-led low-speed design reduces vehicle dominance and produces streets where walking and cycling are the natural choice for short trips. The design code should reference Manual for Streets [23] as its baseline for all internal movement.
- The on-site and off-site cycle network should meet LTN 1/20 standards throughout, with physical separation from motor traffic on busy or higher-speed routes including the A4, and low-speed or low-traffic design on internal streets where LTN 1/20 does not require physical segregation. The A4 already carries a significant volume of heavy goods vehicles and existing cycle provision along it offers no physical protection [11]; routes connecting the development to the town centre and station must not replicate that standard.
- The West Berkshire Strategic Transport Model [4] contains modelled link and junction delay tables (Tables 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4) showing the impact of the development on the A4 and surrounding network in the AM and PM peaks. The SPD consultation should publish, or clearly signpost, these tables so that residents and statutory consultees can assess the transport impacts directly.

5. Delivery Transparency and Accountability

- The SPD should require publication of a phasing schedule clearly distinguishing pre-commencement obligations, phased occupation triggers and post-occupation commitments, updated annually and publicly available. Without this, occupation triggers are unenforceable in practice: developers can proceed phase by phase without residents or ward councillors being able to assess whether S106 commitments are being met. The schedule must be explicit about which infrastructure is guaranteed within the plan period and which depends on post-2041 phases, given that only approximately 1,760 of the 2,500 homes are anticipated within the plan period to 2041 [1].

References and Sources

All sources used in the preparation of representations to the North East Thatcham masterplan SPD consultation, May 2026. Links verified at time of research, April 2026.

1. Adopted Policy and Plan Documents

1. **Inspector's Report including Appendix (William Fieldhouse, April 2025).**
Contains Main Modifications including Colthrop Industrial Estate boundary change and anticipated in-plan-period dwelling figures. westberks.gov.uk/media/63647
2. **North East Thatcham Strategic Site Allocation (Policy SP14), West Berkshire Local Plan Review 2023-2041 (adopted June 2025).**
westberks.gov.uk/media/64243
3. **Schedule of Main Modifications to the West Berkshire Local Plan Review.**
westberks.gov.uk/media/60580

2. Council-Commissioned Evidence Base

4. **West Berkshire Strategic Transport Model - Local Plan Forecasting Report.**
WSP for West Berkshire Council, March 2022. Tables 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4 (modelled A4 link and junction delay impacts); bus mitigation modelling showing 2.5% car trip reduction. westberks.gov.uk/media/53961
5. **Iceni Visioning Report.** *West Berkshire Council, February 2022. Employment and population analysis; office market comparison (Thatcham 85,000 sqft vs Newbury 1m+ sqft over ten years); commuting patterns.* westberks.gov.uk/media/53831
6. **Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4) Evidence Base.** *WSP for West Berkshire Council, January 2023. Employment density mapping; A4 traffic profiles; HGV volumes.* westberks.gov.uk/media/54185

3. Rail Performance and Capacity

7. **ORR GWR Key Statistics 2024/25.** *Office of Rail and Road. On Time 61.5%; Cancellations 4.6%; NR delay minutes 1,011,169.* dataportal.orr.gov.uk
8. **ORR GWR Key Statistics 2023/24.** *Office of Rail and Road. Record NR delay minutes 1,196,963; delay compensation claims 1,434,373.* dataportal.orr.gov.uk
9. **Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group (BTPG).** *Detailed records of all Berks and Hants line closures; peak overcrowding documentation.* steve09478.wixsite.com/btpg
10. **New Civil Engineer - Network Rail Thames Valley investigation.** *January 2024. ORR formal investigation into Wales and Western region; 361 disrupted days on Paddington-Reading route.* newcivilengineer.com
11. **Thatcham Town Council - response to LTP4 consultation.** *August 2023. A4 as barrier to active travel; HGV volumes; level crossing delays; inadequate cycle provision.* thatchamtowncouncil.gov.uk

4. Housing Quality Precedents

12. **Goldsmith Street, Norwich.** *2019 RIBA Stirling Prize. Mikhail Riches and Cathy Hawley for Norwich City Council. Passivhaus standard affordable housing; annual energy bills approximately 150-950 pounds per year.* dezeen.com
13. **Marmalade Lane, Cambridge.** *We Are Town. Car-free lane; 146 cycle spaces; RTPI Silver Jubilee Award. Precedent for LTN 1/20 cycle provision.* wearetown.co.uk

5. Environmental and Biodiversity

14. **Natural England - ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees: advice for making planning decisions.** Sets 15 metre minimum buffer; advises that larger buffers may be required depending on the scale and nature of site-specific impacts. [gov.uk/guidance/ancient-woodland](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ancient-woodland)
15. **North Wessex Downs National Landscape.** northwessexdowns.org.uk
16. **West Berkshire Council, North East Thatcham Masterplan Early Stage Consultation.** States approximately 50% of the site will comprise green infrastructure including a community park. citizen.westberks.gov.uk
17. **Lee Dillon MP, West Berkshire's Pharmacy Crisis.** Documents low pharmacy provision per head in West Berkshire. leedillon.co.uk
18. **Cllr Chris Read, formal representation to West Berkshire Local Plan examination.** Records Thatcham and Woolhampton sewage treatment works at full capacity; significant 24-hour tankering ongoing at Woolhampton throughout winter 2024/25. westberks.gov.uk/media/61856
19. **Colthrop Village Consortium website and Newbury Today reporting on bridge proposal.** Colthrop scheme offered bridge over railway and canal off Pipers Way roundabout. WBC/Network Rail Statement of Common Ground (March 2024) confirms North East Thatcham development would increase crossing traffic even with mitigation; Network Rail stated full support for a bridge. colthropvillagethatcham.co.uk
20. **Thatcham Medical Practice, formal submission to West Berkshire Local Plan examination.** States 18,632 registered patients; confirms that the proposed 450 sqm satellite surgery would not be financially viable and could not meet GMS contract requirements. westberks.gov.uk/media/56872
21. **Bucklebury Parish Council - Healthcare analysis.** Records approximately 27,800 patients across the two Thatcham surgeries at just under 2,000 patients per GP; all three local practices already overstretched; no realistic prospect of a new GP practice being established in Thatcham. bucklebury-pc.gov.uk/healthcare
22. **Kennet School admissions consultation, October 2025.** School proposes to reduce annual admission number from 300 to 270 from 2027, citing falling local birth rates. Demonstrates that North East Thatcham development will materially reverse the demographic trajectory Kennet is currently planning around. newburytoday.co.uk
23. **Manual for Streets (DfT / DCLG, 2007; updated edition 2010).** Government guidance on street design in residential areas; establishes pedestrian-first hierarchy, low-speed design principles and shared surface guidance. [gov.uk/manual-for-streets](https://www.gov.uk/manual-for-streets)
24. **Trees and Design Action Group (TDAG), Trees, Planning and Development: A Guide for Delivery.** Guidance for planners, developers and designers on securing the full range of benefits trees offer in new developments, including canopy cover targets and retention of existing trees. tdag.org.uk
25. **Cranbrook, Devon - new settlement bus provision precedent.** Bus services were operational before first residents arrived; frequency and S106 funding written into planning obligations. Cited as a leading example of early, frequent bus provision preventing car dependency in a new settlement. eastdevon.gov.uk/cranbrook