



**CAPC Feedback regarding Planning
Application 23/00798/OUTMAJ**
Prepared for CAPC by Pete Murray and Ivor Mcardle

Abstract

Cold Ash Parish Council strongly rejects planning application 23/00798/OUTMAJ for Thatcham, West Berkshire site CA12. We contend that the site's unsuitability for development remains unaltered, owing to negative environmental consequences and a lack of local support. Concerns include excessive traffic, insufficient infrastructure, and a failure to evaluate the broader implications of housing expansion. The land is deemed inappropriate by the Cold Ash Neighbourhood Development Plan due to its function in flood defences, urbanisation potential, high-traffic location, and closeness to a Grade II listed structure. West Berkshire Council is urged to reject the idea and respect the community-driven NDP.

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Executive Summary

This planning application (23/00798/OUTMAJ) refers to site CA12 (Land West of Heath Lane and North of Bowling Green Road Thatcham) in West Berkshire Council's Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA).

The Parish Council wish to object to this planning application.

We, the Cold Ash Parish Council, believe that this site is unsuitable for development, that it has been turned down for planning in the past for good reason that has not materially changed, that it would have a negative impact on the environment, and that it is not supported by our local Neighbourhood Development Planning (NDP) process. Furthermore, the traffic increases caused by this expansion would be too much for Cold Ash, and the infrastructure to support 200 dwellings, in addition to the 1,200 houses proposed in the local plan (LP), simply does not exist. This plan, we believe, is problematic in many ways, and the entire macro picture of the impact of housing on the area, its infrastructure, and resources has not been adequately evaluated.

The Cold Ash Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) was created with extensive involvement from all relevant stakeholders. Based on the feedback, we produced a set of policies and constructed a set of evaluation criteria that were used to evaluate all sites within the Housing and Economic Land Availability evaluation (HELAA). Site CA12, which includes the site at Henwick Lane, was not considered a viable option for meeting our housing allocation throughout this phase.

For a variety of reasons, we determined that the land is unsuitable for development. Firstly, it forms an important rural gap between Cold Ash and Thatcham. Secondly, it is a natural sink that plays an important role in the parish's flood defences. Thirdly, the quantity of prospective houses indicates an unacceptably high level of urbanisation. Fourthly, the site is located in a high-traffic location, with vehicles exiting the site needing to connect to the vital road network (M4/A34), compounding traffic concerns on Cold Ash Hill, Hermitage Road, and Red Shute Hill. Finally, the development boundary is only 100 metres away from a Grade II listed structure.

The proposed planning proposal clearly contradicts the views of the local community, and we consequently intend to oppose it. We strongly encourage West Berkshire Council to reject the proposal and honour the NDP produced in conjunction with the local community.

Cold Ash Parish Council Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) assessment of this application

As context, Cold Ash Parish Council has nearly finalised a Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) covering the entire parish. This has been developed based on significant input from all interested stakeholders, culminating in a set of 16 policies. The Cold Ash NDP completed the Pre-Submission Regulation 14 consultation on the 19th of April 2023 and is now at Regulation 15.

An initial review of the comments received during the Regulation 14 consultation provides strong support for the NDP from our parishioners, statutory consultees, and neighbouring councils. This is in line with previous informal consultations on the document as it was being developed.

In developing the NDP, a housing requirement figure (of 40 dwellings) was originally identified by West Berkshire Council (WBC) for Cold Ash parish within the emerging draft of the Local Plan Review (LPR) that was published for a Regulation 18 consultation between December 2020 and February 2021.

Because of this, the Steering Group, on behalf of the Parish Council, undertook site selection work to identify suitable sites to meet this requirement. The work considered all the sites that had been put forward via the HELAA process and each one was carefully assessed using criteria established by the Steering Group.

The assessment work identified one site within the parish that was considered to be available and suitable for development. This site, however, is located within the adopted settlement boundary. Since the work was undertaken, the approach for the Local Plan has been amended to not allocate sites within settlement boundaries because the principle of development is already established. In light of this, West Berkshire Council accepted the site identified for development outside of the NDP and the Proposed Submission version of the Local Plan Review was amended to no longer identify a housing requirement for Cold Ash.

For this reason, the NDP does not allocate housing and this position has been agreed with WBC.

The work that was undertaken by the Parish Council on sites is, however, relevant to this planning application as, in combination with adopted Core Strategy policies and emerging Local Plan Review policies, it provides a rationale as to why this site is not considered suitable for development by Cold Ash Parish Council.

CAPC NDP Policy review of site

1. The site is not allocated for development

The site is not allocated for development in the adopted Housing Site Allocations DPD (2006-2026). In addition, Policy SP12 (Approach to Housing Delivery) of the LPR seeks to deliver 8,721 to 9,146 net additional homes in West Berkshire for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2039. The HELAA has been prepared to inform the allocation of strategic sites to contribute to this requirement. This site has not been selected for inclusion as a strategic site (Policy SP13 Sites allocated for residential and mixed-use development in Newbury and Thatcham).

The LPR states that no additional dwellings will be brought forward through the Cold Ash NDP. Site selection work prepared as part of the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan has concluded that only one site within the neighbourhood area (contiguous with the parish boundary) was suitable for allocation. This site is located within the settlement boundary.

The site referred to in this planning application is too large (in terms of quantum of development) to be considered windfall (defined in the LPR as 140 per annum across the whole district) and, even if it were, it is also outside the settlement boundary.

2. The site sits outside the adopted settlement boundary

Core Strategy: Area Delivery Plan Policy 1 identified settlement boundaries, which identify the main built-up area of a settlement within which development is considered acceptable in principle, subject to other policy considerations. While allowing for development, settlement boundaries protect the character of a settlement and prevent unrestricted growth into the countryside. They create a level of certainty about whether or not the principle of development is likely to be acceptable.

The site is not within an adopted settlement boundary.

A review of the settlement boundaries was undertaken to inform the LPR and the settlement boundary area has not been amended to include this area.

Policy DM1 (Residential development in the countryside) of the LPR states that “exceptionally, new residential development outside of adopted settlement boundaries will be permitted. These exceptions are solely limited to development which is appropriately designed and located and which satisfies one or more of the following criteria..”. The site in question would not meet the criteria.

3. The site represents an important gap between the settlements of Cold Ash and Thatcham

Settlements are a key component of the landscape, and in West Berkshire most settlements can trace their origins back over many millennia. A key feature in West Berkshire, of even the larger settlements, is the way in which few have coalesced in recent times, and so the blurring of the physical distinction between places has largely been avoided. Policy CS 19 (Historic Environment and Landscape Character) of the adopted Core Strategy seeks to ensure that coalescence continues to be avoided to ensure that the diversity and local distinctiveness of the landscape character of the District is conserved and enhanced. It is essential that new development should help sustain and/or create landscapes with a strong sense of place and local identity and this is another key element of the policy.

Development of this site would be unacceptable because it would result in the coalescence of Thatcham and Cold Ash. This was stated in the conclusion reached in the HELAA (Appendix 4 Site Assessments) and in the Cold Ash NDP site assessments.

To further strengthen this point, in November 2022 the [West Berkshire Appropriate Countryside Designation Study](#) was prepared by WBDC and this study identifies if appropriate and specific planning designation for the countryside around the towns of Newbury and Thatcham is needed.

The study recommends two parcels of land between Thatcham and Cold Ash and Thatcham and Ashmore Green (as shown in the diagram below) for potential green gap designation in the Local Plan Review:

Policy DM2 (Separation of Settlements Around Newbury & Thatcham) of the LPR identifies that the two parcels of land as shown in Figure 1 should be maintained to avoid coalescence and maintain the separate identities of the settlements.

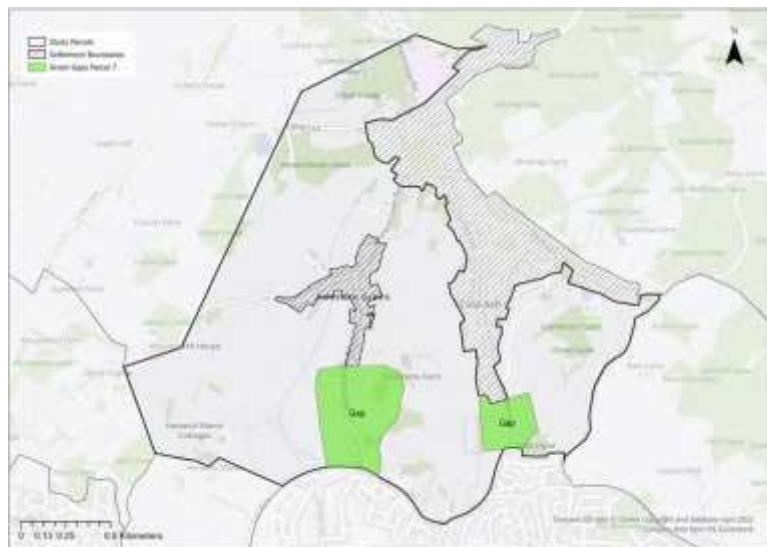


Figure 14 – Parcel 7 Potential Green Gaps

Figure 1: Proposed parcels to restrict development (LPR)

Policy CAP1 (Location of Development) of the NDP seeks to extend the proposed buffer zones to include land as shown in Figure 2. This will assist in maintaining the distinctive identities of both Cold Ash and Ashmore Green and reduce encroachment and coalescence with Thatcham.

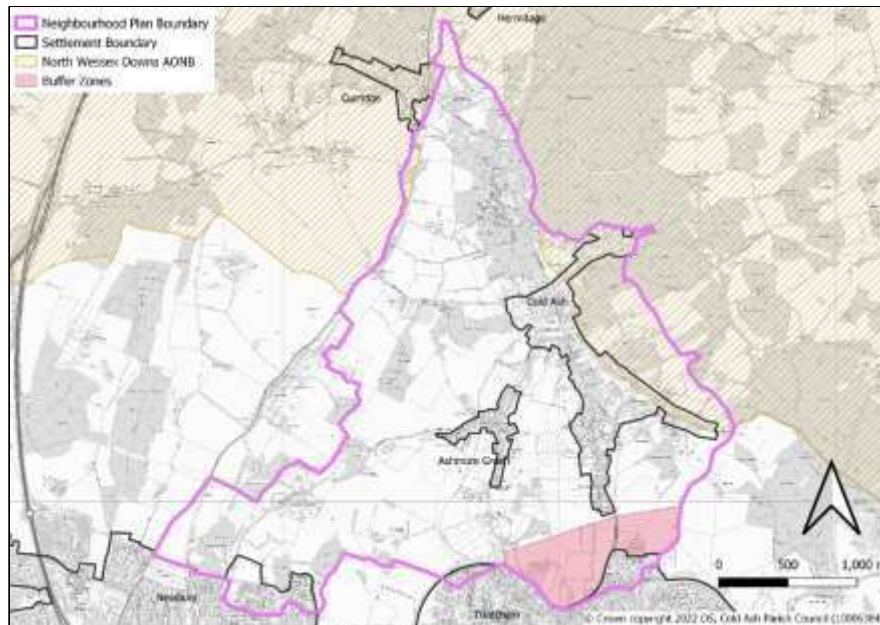


Figure 2: Area additional to the LPR parcels to restrict coalescence

The proposed site falls partially within the LPR-identified buffer and wholly within the NDP-identified buffer.

Policy CAP2 (Local character and heritage) provides additional detail on the character of the Parish, defining the area in question as ‘Rural’. The Rural Zone is effectively the open countryside space that weaves between the settlements and in the main is largely agricultural. It is not anticipated that any development will happen in these rural environments – part of which are situated within the AONB, and all of which contribute towards the AONB’s setting.

4. The area is a natural sink and forms a key service in the parish’s flood defences

The hilly nature of Cold Ash parish introduces a significant level of flood risk to the lower reaches of the parish and surrounding areas, including areas of Newbury and Thatcham. A major surface flood flow route passes through the site towards the east side and in the southeast and southwest corners.

Policy CS 16 of the adopted Core Strategy (re-emphasised in Policy SP6 of the LPR) says that the sequential approach in accordance with the NPPF will be strictly applied across the district. Development within areas of flood risk from any source of flooding, including Critical Drainage Areas and areas with a history of groundwater or surface water flooding, will only be accepted if it is demonstrated that it is appropriate at that location, and that there are no suitable and available alternative sites at a lower flood risk.

5. The number of potential dwellings represents an unacceptable level of urbanisation

Policy CS 19 (Historic Environment and Landscape Character) of the adopted Core Strategy underlines the need for any development to be in-keeping with local character.

Policy SP8 (Landscape Character) of the LPR states that “the natural, cultural, and perceptual components of the character of the landscape will be considered as a whole. Particular regard will be given to: a. Its valued features and qualities; b. The sensitivity and capacity of the area to change; and c. Ensuring that new development is appropriate in terms of location, scale and design in the context of the existing settlement form, pattern and character”.

At a national level, the NPPF emphasises the importance of ensuring that local communities (via neighbourhood plans) are actively involved in defining the character for their area. As previously noted, Policy CAP2 (Local character and heritage) provides additional detail on the distinctive character of the Parish, defining the area in question as ‘Rural’.

The proposal is not considered to be in keeping with the prevailing ‘rural’ character of the Parish.

6. The site sits in an area that is a particular traffic hotspot (ie. traffic leaving the site that needs to join the strategic road network [M4/A34] will add to traffic issues on Cold Ash Hill / Hermitage Road / Red Shute Hill)

Policy CS 13 (Transport) of the adopted Core Strategy, among other aims, seeks to promote active travel, minimise impacts on the strategic route network and demonstrate good access to key services and facilities. This is re-emphasised in Policy SP23 of the LPR. There is a concern that the site will simply add additional traffic to the Parish, contributing to existing congestion issues. The site is an extension of Thatcham; therefore, it is unlikely that it will provide residents of Cold Ash with services or facilities accessible to them.

In addition, we are concerned that the macro effects of traffic through the parish are not considered here, only sites in isolation. Currently as part of the WBC Local Plan (and particularly regarding the proposed 1,500 houses in North East Thatcham THAT20) an independent inspector is considering feedback where we provided traffic evidence and concerns from an independent traffic analysis of the WBC LP traffic plan and its impact on the parish. We believe that these concerns are equally applicable here and should be considered.

Our independent consultant raised serious concerns about the dependability of the WBC modelling outputs following a thorough examination of the transportation evidence base (A Study conducted by SW Transport Planning Ltd in February 2023). The WBSTM is a broad-area, strategic traffic model designed to guide strategic decisions about the district's future growth, with a focus on key traffic corridors.

According to the evidence in this report, there are concerns about the model's ability to accurately forecast impacts at the local level, including within Cold Ash parish.

Specifically:

- Despite the widely varying levels of growth and variable mitigation assumptions built into each test, there are virtually no differences in the forecast traffic flows for each of the model scenarios, as noted in Section 3 *of our study*. A key finding from the modelling is that full Local Plan growth is expected to result in traffic flow reductions in many areas of Cold Ash parish, with only minor increases elsewhere. Given the scale of development in the Local Plan and the proximity of the THA20 site, this appears to be a highly improbable conclusion, casting doubt on the WBC model's reliability. The most recent Local Plan Forecasting Report recognises that modelling is an iterative and ongoing process. This review shows that more work is needed to fully understand and improve the model's functionality in the Cold Ash area, as well as possibly in other rural areas.
- THA20 consideration includes bespoke trip generation rates that are significantly lower than the default trip rates built into the WBSTM. While the principle of using bespoke rates is not unreasonable, the methodology used in this case, as described in Section 2.4 *of our study*, is flawed and underestimates the likely trip generation. In addition, additional trip discounts have been applied to account for non-highway mitigation measures. This equates to a 7.5% reduction in car trips due to assumptions about increased bus patronage and increased use of walking and cycling modes of transportation. Although it is a minor change, the predicted reduction is based on unsubstantiated assumptions and relies on aspirational mitigation measures that may not be implemented.
- Furthermore, as mentioned in paragraph 2.4.2 *of our study*, the traffic modelling currently does not include the full level of Local Plan growth required to meet the District Council's target of 5,510. There is a 759-unit housing shortage. According to the Local Plan Forecasting Report, a portion of this shortfall (325 dwellings) may need to be provided on Cold Ash sites CA12, CA16, and CA17. Clearly, this would have a direct impact on the parish's road network, but it is not currently accounted for in the modelling.

Given the above, it is believed that the WBSTM outputs do not accurately reflect the changes in traffic flows that are likely to occur within Cold Ash, and their significant impact on the parish. Thus, we conclude that the current evidence base does not provide a solid foundation for determining the traffic impacts of Local Plan growth.

7. Development boundary within in 100m of Grade II listed building

Policy CS 19 (Historic Environment and Landscape Character) of the adopted Core Strategy recognises the role of heritage assets and their contribution to local character. Policy DM10 (Listed Buildings) of the LPR states that development will not be permitted if it would: i. Adversely affect the character, scale, proportion, design, detailing, or materials used in the Listed Building; or ii. Result in the loss of/irreversible change to original features or other features of importance or interest; or iii. Harm the setting of the Listed Building.

There is a concern that development of scale proposed will negatively impact the listed building and its setting.

Overview

Heritage Category:	Listed Building
Grade:	II
List Entry Number:	1291105
Date first listed:	09-Sep-1969
List Entry Name:	OLD HENWICK COTTAGE
Statutory Address:	OLD HENWICK COTTAGE, ASHMORE GREEN ROAD



Uploaded by [Charlie Henderson](#)
This photo may not represent the current condition of the site

 View all

Response to Croudace Homes feedback on the CAPC NDP

Nexus Planning responded to the NDP Regulation 14 informal consultation, as representatives of Croudace Homes Ltd in 2023. The following section outlines the feedback and CAPC response.

“Croudace supports the principles which sit behind the production of a Neighbourhood Plan for Cold Ash and in line with the National Planning Policy Framework at paragraph 29 agrees that “neighbourhood planning gives communities the power to develop a shared vision for their area”. “

In response to Croudace’s assertion:

“Neighbourhood plans should not promote less development than set out in the strategic policies for the area or undermine those strategic policies” whilst footnote 18 outlines that “Neighbourhood plans must be in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in any development plan that covers their area.”

Cold Ash Parish Council, as the nominated Qualifying Body, confirms that our Neighbourhood Plan does not promote less development than set out in the strategic policies for the area or undermine those strategic policies, as our plan fully meets the development target allocated to us in the Local Plan. We also contend that our NDP is in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the Local Plan, a fact that will be supported by the Basic Conditions Report that is being developed as part of the Regulation 15 stage and will be part of our Regulation 16 submission.

In response to Croudace’s assertion:

In seeking to align with both the extant development plan and the emerging LPR, Croudace considers that the draft Neighbourhood Plan is both:

- a. Close to being outdated – as the development plan which contains strategic policies will soon be replaced by the LPR or a later iteration of it; and*
- b. Premature– as the LPR has only recently been submitted to the Secretary of State and may be subject to changes following examination.*

Cold Ash Parish Council, as the Qualifying Body, confirms that it is fully aware of the relationship between our Neighbourhood Plan and the LPR. We have been in continual contact with West Berkshire Council on this point and engaged an independent consultant to advise us. It has been confirmed that there is no proscriptive sequence in developing the two plans. We understand that should our NDP be made prior to the Local Plan being made, then we will need to carry out a review of it to ensure that it remains in general conformance with the made Local Plan. This is something we fully recognise and are prepared to undertake. Therefore, we do not accept the contention that our plan is premature nor that it is close to being outdated.

In response to Croudace's assertion:

In addition, Croudace wishes to emphasise the basic conditions that a draft neighbourhood plan must meet if it is to proceed to referendum, as set out within Planning Practice Guidance⁴ (PPG) as follows:

a. Having regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State it is appropriate to make the order (or neighbourhood plan).

- 4. The making of the order (or neighbourhood plan) contributes to the achievement of sustainable development.*
- 5. The making of the order (or neighbourhood plan) is in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the development plan for the area of the authority (or any part of that area).*
- 6. The making of the order (or neighbourhood plan) does not breach, and is otherwise compatible with, EU obligations.*
- 7. Prescribed conditions are met in relation to the Order (or plan) and prescribed matters have been complied with in connection with the proposal for the order (or neighbourhood plan).*

Cold Ash Parish Council, as the nominated Qualifying Body, confirms that it is fully aware of the basic conditions that a NDP must meet and is content that our draft NDP meets them. In relation to 'sustainable development', the NDP fully meets the housing allocation given to it by West Berkshire Council, through the Local Plan. Cold Ash Parish Council has also confirmed, through informal consultations, that the people of Cold Ash do not want the Cold Ash NDP to allocate housing numbers over and above the number allocated to it by West Berkshire Council.

Cold Ash Parish Council, as nominated Qualifying Body of the Cold Ash Neighbourhood Development Plan, therefore objects to the planning application put forward by Croudace (23/00798/OUTMAJ).