

THAMES FARM ACTION GROUP (TFAG)

UPDATE 5

Sent to all residents who have registered on the TFAG Database.

The recent lull in communication from TFAG might suggest that there has been little activity surrounding Thames Farm over the last few months. The reality is that TFAG has been very busy. A concerning picture is developing as TFAG has been able to obtain more information on the planning (or lack of it) surrounding Thames Farm.

At the beginning of March in Update 4 TFAG reported on the latest drainage proposal from Taylor Wimpey and the concerns raised by the JBA report on the potential consequences to the aquifer of Taylor Wimpey's proposed grouting activity at Thames Farm.

Both the latest drainage proposal and the JBA report has led to a number of new developments together with other activity undertaken by TFAG including pressing SODC to answer complaints regarding the handling of the non-material / material change planning issue, agreeing a cooperation strategy with Henley and Harpsden Councils and requesting information from SODC under freedom of information (FOI) access.

The Latest Taylor Wimpey Proposal.

The latest Taylor Wimpey proposal, whilst better from a Shiplake perspective than the original proposal of discharging surface water in to the Lashbrook, also raises serious concerns. Not surprisingly, and as highlighted recently by various contributors to the Henley Standard, Henley and Harpsden residents and councillors also have major concerns with this latest proposal.

A summary of the issues TFAG has identified with the proposal are as follows;

- Taylor Wimpey's flood risk appraisal identifies the two pathways of "low risk" (i.e. low probability) surface water flooding running across the site. These indicate the risks of surface water flows entering from offsite, but these are not taken into account either within the layout of homes on the site, nor in the design of the drainage system. This raises the risk that the site drainage system will not deliver the standard of protection that it has been designed to meet. Taylor Wimpey's housing layout and design still includes the use of permeable paving and surfaces to attenuate surface water and allow it to permeate into the ground. The effectiveness of these measures will be negligible following the ground compaction and grouting leading to greater surface water run-off.
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- The calculation of surface water storage on the site has not considered the impacts of the proposed grouting and compaction on the areas of the site which will remain as green surfaces. These measures are likely to reduce the ground's permeability and thus increase runoff from what is currently a highly permeable site, increasing the risk of overloading the site's drainage system or causing runoff from the site. •

In considering options for discharging surface water, the study has not considered the option of reducing the development intensity on the site to make space for infiltration drainage to be used at a safe distance from buildings. Neither has a deep borehole soakaway outside of SPZ1 been considered.

- A pumped discharge to the Northern Watercourse is selected as the preferred option. Introducing pumping commits Thames Water, as proposed adopters of the system, to an energy intensive solution, which is contrary to both Thames Water's, and SODCs stated objectives on climate change and achieving net-zero greenhouse emissions.

- The study has modelled the Northern Watercourse (River Harp) to which discharge is proposed. However, the report is very light on the details of the hydrological methods applied and shows no detailed model results. The consultant's photographs show sections of the Northern Watercourse to be highly overgrown with constricting culverts. The impact of the proposed discharge on water levels in this watercourse has not been adequately demonstrated, so it is not yet possible to conclude that the proposal will have negligible impact on flood risk. The discharge will require a land drainage consent, and modelling and hydrology reports which should be submitted to Oxfordshire County Council for review.

- Taylor Wimpey's current proposal assumes that grouting is low risk due to only effecting the unsaturated zone above the aquifer, however, it is not clear from ground investigation data that disturbed ground does not extend below the water table. Therefore, an updated Hydrogeological Impact Assessment (HIA) should be submitted to demonstrate that the grouting works will not pose a pollution risk to the Chalk aquifer, including additional monitoring and analysis of groundwater levels to demonstrate that grouting is not required below the water table. The composition of any leachate from the grout material should be specified within the HIA and whether this could impact upon the aquifer water quality. The findings of this assessment should then be adopted into the Construction and Environmental Management Plan for the development.

Henley and Harpsden.

Henley and Harpsden residents and councillors are unhappy with the latest proposal as it proposes discharging surface water across land close to the football fields and across private land to the Thames as well as the very serious potential of contamination of the aquifer and water supply.

TfAG met with both Henley and Harpsden Councils to agree a strategy to combat this latest proposal. It was agreed that the common ground was the potential damage to the aquifer and water supply and that Shiplake, Harpsden and Henley should jointly fight and fund a

defence of this precious resource. It was also agreed, partly because Shiplake had already commissioned its' own report from JBA, but also because there may be a future conflict of interest that Henley and Harpsden would fund their own flooding report.

The Argument of Material v Non-Material Changes to the Original Planning Permission.

From the outset TFAG has argued that the changes to the drainage solution once the sink holes were discovered at Thames Farm represented a material change to the original plan and the terms of the consent granted on Appeal by Claire Engber following SODC's rejection of the original application.

SODC's Head of Planning, Adrian Duffield rejected this as the decision on materiality in his opinion was not sufficient to warrant a new application by Taylor Wimpey despite the requirement laid down by the Inspector that the reserved matter of drainage be satisfied before building should commence. To compound this, SODC then retrospectively gave permission to Taylor Wimpey to build the access roads six months or so after they started the works.

The question has to be asked and indeed has been asked, why was this allowed to happen?

TFAG complained to SODC regarding the process used by SODC planners and their failure to adopt their own published rules and processes which was rejected firstly by the SODC Planning Manager and then rejected again on appeal by the Head of Planning (Adrian Duffield). The Head of planning denied being involved with the application, stating *"I can confirm that I have not been involved in these applications, but I do have an understanding of the site and the planning history"*, and reiterated that SODC planning officers did not believe the changes to the application were material. TFAG has now escalated to the Local authority Ombudsman who is currently reviewing the case.

Returning to the question, why was this allowed to happen?

Using its rights of access given under the Freedom of information Act, TFAG requested a number of documents essentially regarding the communication between Taylor Wimpey and SODC Planning and internal correspondence. After wading through some 200 documents it has become clear that a number of discrepancies in the picture painted by SODC exist, as documented by emails obtained through the FOI, and contradicts the response to the complaints made by TFAG

Firstly, it is clear that the SODC Planning officers **were** concerned at the changes being proposed by Taylor Wimpey following the discovery of the sink holes at Thames Farm. Also, it appears that the Head of Planning **was** materially involved and had a discussion with Taylor Wimpey at the beginning of April 2020. Within a day of this conversation the Planning Officer involved was seeking an expedited registration of the Non-Material Application. It appears that the Planning officer concerned changed her view from that of believing that

the changes being proposed by Taylor Wimpey were material and requiring a new application, to being non material within 1 day of the discussion. This was also at a time when Taylor Wimpey were getting very close to “timing out” on the permission as they had not met the conditionality issues within the timescales specified by the Inspector. T FAG has asked for an explanation from Adrian Duffield as to what was agreed in this meeting and details of any contemporaneous notes made.

In any event planning is meant to be the process of deciding in detail how to do something before actually starting to do it. SODC knew of the sink holes before allowing the works to commence which they knew would compromise the original drainage solution. They then retrospectively granted permission **after** the works to the access roads were completed without an agreed or permitted drainage strategy. It is difficult to see any planning or forethought in this decision.

Taylor Wimpey.

- Still has not actually applied for permission for the new proposed scheme.
- Still has not provided T FAG with the data regarding water levels and the aquifer it claims to have or what its grouting proposals comprise.
- Is meeting with agencies to get tacit approval of the latest proposal.

What Now?

An important point to note is that at this moment in time Taylor Wimpey has still not actually applied for permission for the latest proposal, so as it stands there is no decision to make. However, this will not go on forever and an application will be made in the near future. T FAG and the Community will need as many letters and representations to be made as and when the application is made. Please be prepared.

T FAG is spending money now on legal advice and will need funds to continue this campaign.

For those who stated that they were prepared to contribute please do transfer those funds to the following account;

Account Name; Adrian Mercer

Account Number; **17453259**

Sort Code; **60-10-35**

- All contributions will be acknowledged by email

- Any funds not spent will be reimbursed pro rata at the end of the campaign.

Make Your Voice Heard.

Write to the Henley Standard letters@henleystandard.co.uk and make your points via Social Media.

Thank you for your support.

TFAG