

Planning

HEAD OF SERVICE: ADRIAN DUFFIELD



Listening Learning Leading

Local residents

Contact officer: Adrian Duffield

planning@southoxon.gov.uk

Tel: 01235 422600

Textphone users add 18001 before you dial

Our reference: P20/S2808/DIS

07 May 2021

Dear Sir / Madam

Thames Farm, Reading Road, Lower Shiplake Update in connection with planning application reference: P20/S2808/DIS

I am writing in connection with the proposed development at Thames Farm site. We are aware that there is significant public interest in recent developments on the site and we thought it would be helpful to share with you some factual information and provide an update on the latest position.

This letter has been prepared in consultation with Thames Water, the Environment Agency and Oxfordshire County Council.

Background information

The site has a long planning history dating back over 10 years which culminated in outline planning permission being granted (P16/S0970/O) for 95 dwellings on appeal in 2017. The appeal took the form of a public inquiry and the Inspector's decision was the subject of a request for a judicial review by the council. However, the request was unsuccessful, and the outline permission stands.

After the outline permission was secured, the site was sold, and the current owners are Taylor Wimpey. The company submitted an application for the reserved matters (P19/S0245/RM) in May 2019 and commenced discharging the requirements of the 11 planning conditions attached to the outline permission. In addition, Taylor Wimpey secured some amendments to the permission which included a change to the wording to condition 11 (which referred to on/off site drainage) and allowed for access and highway works. As you are no doubt aware these works have been undertaken.

Taylor Wimpey also applied for a Certificate of Lawful Development, the purpose of which was confirm they had made a lawful commencement of the approved development. The certificate was issued on 6 November 2020.

Current position

All the planning conditions have been formally discharged except for condition 11. The amended drainage condition 11 remains outstanding and to date agreement has not been reached. This is mainly because the ground conditions in the local area have proven to be complex with the relatively recent discovery of large voids under the site.

Ground conditions

The complexity of the ground conditions was not apparent at the planning application and appeal stage. Indeed, the council only became aware of the situation after the current owners had conducted extensive survey work and presented that information in February 2020. It is now evident that some significant ground stabilisation work will be required prior to any further work being carried out on the site. Officers have informed Taylor Wimpey that based on the information we have to date the proposed ground works, which include the filling of cavities, represent a separate engineering operation in their own right that requires planning permission.

Although the drainage matters and the ground stabilisation works are two separate issues, depending on the proposed solutions there may or may not be interdependencies. If and when an application is received to address the ground conditions the council will conduct public consultation in accordance with legislation and it is likely that we may seek expert advice. Until the council has approved a scheme for the groundwork, tree planting is unlikely to be agreed or undertaken.

Drainage

The last drainage strategy submitted by Taylor Wimpey in October 2020 was not found acceptable and consequently they are exploring alternatives. Taylor Wimpey have consulted the local community on their latest drainage strategy, which would involve pumping water to the north of Shiplake to join a watercourse that runs between Shiplake and Henley. It is understood that they are considering comments made by local residents and assessing their options on how to progress. Taylor Wimpey have not submitted an alternative drainage strategy (since Oct) to the council for consideration but if and when they do, we will consult with the local community in addition to all the relevant expert consultees.

Street lighting

The street lighting that has been carried out is part of the approved road improvements and requirement for junction safety. The Council County as Highway Authority has confirmed the lights will remain lit at night for highway safety reasons.

The adjoining site

For your information the council is also considering an application for the discharge of conditions on the adjoining site known as Thames Farm Barn. The change of use of this building to 4 residential units was permitted in 2017 (P17/S3119/FUL). The requirements of some of the conditions attached to this permission remain outstanding due to the knowledge we now have of the local ground constraints.

Going forwards

We understand that many residents were opposed to the principle of development on this site would like the current drainage condition details before the council to be

rejected. However, in accordance with paragraph 38 of the National Planning Policy Framework, the council is expected to work constructively with the developer to find solutions to enable the permission to proceed.

As outlined above we are currently waiting for Taylor Wimpey to confirm their timetable for submitting a revised alternative drainage strategy and how they intend to deal with the ground stabilisation works on the Thames Farm site. When any new plan or scheme is received then they will be subject to consultation with local residents and community groups.

We hope this information is helpful and reassures you that matters on this site are being considered very carefully and that as and when formal plan submissions or applications are made, they will be the subject of public consultation.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Adrian Duffield". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending from the bottom of the name.

Adrian Duffield
Head of Service