

Thames Farm Appeal Comments

P16/S0970/O Thames Farm, Reading Road, Shiplake RG9 3PH. Prev appeal:
APP/Q3115/A/14/2217931. APP/Q3115/W/16/3161733

Thank you for allowing us some time to provide additional representations regarding the above appeal.

Following the submission of the Appellant's Rule 20 Statement received by this parish on the 20th February we would like to make the following additional comments regarding the Thames Farm application:

We would very much like any appeal to be heard in public as was the case with APP/Q3115/A/14/2217931. There is considerable local community interest in this application and we would anticipate a strong attendance of residents at any Inquiry. There was strong public attendance at the last appeal in Henley Town Hall which was ably conducted by Mr Ian Jenkins.

The appellant implies a split of residents for and against this development but a public Inquiry will show the true depth of feeling within the community. Furthermore, serious and publicly verified allegations have been made by some objectors that their names were put forward as supporters without their knowledge when their views were quite the opposite.

Given the amount of time it takes for our parishes to prepare for an Inquiry and the effort and expense involved would it be possible for there to be a single Inquiry for the two outstanding applications? Also, would it be possible for the Inquiry to be pushed back to the summer/autumn to provide us with sufficient time to prepare our arguments?

At the last Inquiry, Mr Jenkins gave the two Parish Chairs ample time to present their cases and often asked for comments from the parishes during the 8 day Inquiry, could it be confirmed that this process may be replicated for the new Inquiry? We will not be a Rule 6 party but we will submit representations in support of South Oxfordshire District Council.

A Written Ministerial Statement (WMS) was published on the 12th December 2016 in respect of Neighbourhood Planning. This site falls within the Joint Henley Harpsden Neighbourhood Plan area (JHNP) and this Plan is less than two years old. In recent appeals SODC has been able to demonstrate a 3 year plus land supply position with an improving land supply position. Confirmation of this Ministerial position and opposition to development at this site has been made by local MP John Howell. Furthermore, the local OCC Councillor, the Ward District Councillors; both the parishes of Shiplake and Harpsden and Henley Town Council are against it.

The site remains unsustainable for development. To quote Inspector Jenkins decision at APP/Q3115/A/14/2217931

“Nonetheless, the scheme would have a severe adverse residual cumulative effect on the safety and convenience of highway users. I attach great weight to this harm, which weighs very heavily against the scheme. Furthermore, it would have an adverse effect on the character and appearance of the area, which also weighs significantly against it.

I conclude overall that the degree to which facilities and services would be accessible from the site by sustainable modes of transport would be poor to moderate.

Whilst the Highways and Transport Statement of Common Ground (SoCGH) indicates that the detailed design process may reveal a more suitable point at which to cross Reading Road, no details of likely alternatives have been provided to me. Given the winding nature of the highway hereabouts, which restricts intervisibility between drivers and pedestrians crossing the road, I am not convinced that a suitable alternative could be found. I give the unsupported assertion contained within the SoCGH little weight”.

And finally, his penultimate paragraph:

Having had regard to the social, environmental and economic impacts of the scheme, I consider on balance that the benefits of the proposal would be significantly and demonstrably outweighed by its adverse impacts. Whilst I have had regard to the conditions suggested, in my judgement, it would not be possible through the imposition of reasonable conditions to mitigate the harm that I have identified sufficiently to make the development acceptable in planning terms. I conclude overall, with reference to the Framework, that the scheme would not amount to sustainable development.

Since the first appeal, the parish of Shiplake retained a ROSPA recommended and approved Highway consultant Traffic Management and Safety (not mentioned by the Appellant) to review the safety aspects of this Thames Farm application. The report seriously conflict with the views of both OCC Highways and the Appellant’s consultants and this evidence was presented to the SODC planning committee which unanimously endorsed the serious highway risks associated with the site. Two reports by the consultants TMS are enclosed. We therefore do not feel that the Highway safety issue can be dealt with by the use of a Grampian condition.

The position of OCC Highways is challengeable and seems to have moved since the first Inquiry. A site directly opposite the Thames Farm site has been rejected as unsafe and unsustainable from a Highway point of view. The second application plans suggest road lighting to improve visibility and highway safety which was not mentioned in the first appeal and which would have an additional adverse impact by further urbanising the area. The strategic position of OCC conflicts with the Officer view and states that:

“The amount of growth already included in the Henley & Harpsden Neighbourhood Plan, made in April 2016, is considered appropriate for the period to 2032. There are significant transport infrastructure issues around Henley and there are no proposals for infrastructure improvements which would lead Oxfordshire County Council to consider that additional housing allocations could be made in the area.”

We also understand that OCC site visit time was limited, distant and paper-based – repeated and detailed visits by Inspector Jenkins, the SODC Planning Committee, local evidence and TMS consultancy contradict the Appellant’s case.

We trust there will be a single public Inquiry for the Thames farm appeals. The location is unsuitable and unsustainable and carries significant highway risk as well as real detriment to the local environment. Furthermore, the site sits inside a very recent Neighbourhood Plan area which specifically rejected this agricultural site as unsuitable for any form of residential development in favour of other locations to meet the NP housing allocation.

Tudor Taylor (Chairman) on behalf of Shiplake Parish Council