**Thames Farm Appeal Comments**. 28th February 2017

P16/S0970/O - Thames Farm, Reading Road, Shiplake RG9 3PH.

Previous appeals: APP/Q3115/A/14/2217931. APP/Q3115/W/16/3161733

Thank you for allowing additional time for further comments following receipt of the Appellant’s Rule 20 Statement. Our comments should be read together with, and in support of, those already submitted by our colleagues and close neighbour, Shiplake Parish Council.

At the outset we should mention that whilst Thames Farm has a ‘Shiplake’ address the site itself falls within the parish of Harpsden. The owner of Thames Farm, Ms Claire Engbers, offered this site for consideration during the initial stages of the Joint Henley Harpsden Neighbourhood Plan (JHHNP). The site failed all but one of the 14 measures used to calculate the suitability of sites for housing; the only one it passed was that it did not flood. The site was not, therefore, considered for inclusion in the Joint Neighbourhood Plan. Since then application after application has been made based on legal points but never, it would seem, on genuine grounds of sustainability.

Inspector Jenkins concluded in his decision at APP/Q3115/A/14/2217931 that the “*scheme would not amount to sustainable development”.* That the Appeal decision was subsequently overturned by the High Court on a point of law does not mean that Inspector Jenkins was wrong about “sustainable development” and we believe that any future Inspector would be obliged to consider very carefully the comments of Inspector Jenkins in this matter.

Harpsden Parish Council has not been satisfied with the contribution of OCC Highways in this whole matter. They have not, as far as we know, even visited the site. They seem to think that as the A4155 at this point has a 30 mph speed limit that no one will ever exceed this limit and that if they do then it is simply a police matter. Whilst this may be a convenient way of dismissing an awkward problem it does not deal with the reality of the safety issues at stake. Traffic going towards Henley regularly speeds down this road and around the left hand bend/corner by the War Memorial roundabout. In amplification:

1. on Sunday 12 February 2017 a Police Camera Van parked by a gate just around this corner, between 2 and 3 pm, booked 11 cars that were speeding at between 35 and 46 mph. This is almost the exact location where a zebra crossing is proposed for Thames Farm residents, and children, to cross the road to catch school buses, etc.
2. on Easter Sunday 2006 a fatal accident occurred at the junction of Station Road and Woodlands Road by the War Memorial roundabout. Accidents of one sort or another are fairly frequent at this spot, the latest occurring on 15th February 2017 which was, we are advised, logged by The Police.
3. there is considerable vegetation growing on this sharp left hand bend /corner. In Winter sight lines are only marginally impaired but in Summer the vegetation grows out quite rapidly and impedes motorists’ view accordingly. There is a chance that if motorists abide by the speed limit then accidents may just be avoided but if, particularly in Summer, they go round this bend at, say, between 35 and 46 mph, then accidents, possibly fatal, may well occur.
4. During Prime Ministers questions on 9th March 2016 (available on You Tube - move the slider to 22.40 minutes) the PM made clear, in response to a question regarding a fatal accident, that the views of Parish Councils on Traffic and Safety must be respected as they know their area best. It is the view of Harpsden Parish Council that the proposals regarding Traffic and Safety that have been proposed by Thames Farm are wholly inadequate and should be seen as such. We are also wholly supportive of the work done by Shiplake Council and their traffic consultants, Traffic Management and Safety, and fully endorse their findings and recommendations.

The applications make much of the fact that 40% of the proposed housing will be affordable. By definition residents of affordable housing need to be within walking distance of vital services be they schools, surgeries, shops, etc, and it is interesting to note that the affordable homes, unlike the other homes on the site, have been designed without a garage (a few parking spaces are available presumably for visitors) consequently, one would expect pedestrian and public transport provision to be first class. This is not the case at Thames Farm where pedestrian access is limited and sub-standard. Whilst the Bus Stop in the direction of Henley is within reasonable walking distance, albeit without a pavement, the return journey Bus Stop is by the War Memorial Roundabout on Station Road. Consequently, the walk home with heavy shopping bags crossing a dangerous zebra crossing, possibly with children and or a pram, is at best fraught with difficulty. This is not a sustainable site for affordable housing and, consequently, the appeal(s) should fail.

It is possible that these appeals, referenced above, may be argued on the basis that SODC do not meet the required Land Supply Numbers. We believe that finding for the appellant on this basis would not be fair. Our JHHNP has been legally made and should not be over ridden by a fault of a third party whose actions we cannot specifically control. Henley and Harpsden entered in to an Agreement with Government that “If we accepted a certain number of new dwellings we could choose where they go”. If our JHHNP is overridden for reasons outside of our control then, we would submit, that our NP is not worth the paper it is written on. The implications for the whole NP process throughout the country would, therefore, clear for all to see.

In this connection it is very relevant that, OCC, when reviewing the SODC Plan to 2032 stated that “*there are significant transport infrastructure issues around Henley and there are no proposals for infrastructure improvements that would lead OCC to consider that additional housing allocations could be made in the area*”. The proposals for Thames Farm, in our view, amount to “additional housing allocations” and should not be permitted. It follows therefore that the appeal(s) should fail.

Finally, may we re-iterate our desire for any appeal to be heard in public as was done with the earlier appeal in December 2014. There was strong local interest and attendance at the 2014 Appeal, chaired by Inspector Ian Jenkins, and we are strongly of the view that this is still very much the case. We know of very few local residents who are genuinely in favour of the many and varied applications lodged by Thames Farm and, in our view, any such supporters were largely motivated by the desire to move other proposed developments away from their area of residence to another site, e.g. Thames Farm. Mr. Jenkins gave time for both Shiplake and Harpsden Councils to make Presentations and to make comments during the course of the Appeal. We would very much hope that this will be the case in any future Appeal(s).

Kester George, C.B.E (Chairman) & Tony Wright (Dep. Chairman)

on behalf of **Harpsden Parish Council**.