

Somerford Keynes Parish Council

Clerk: Mrs Muriel Watkins

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Attn. Mr Jason Betty,
Minerals Planning,
Gloucestershire County Council,
Shire Hall,
Gloucester GL1 2TH

Thursday, 02 August 2012

Ref: 09/0014/CWMAJM

Dear Sir,

Re: Application to extract sand and gravel from land east of Spratsgate Lane, Somerford Keynes

The Parish Council has now seen the new information provided by the applicants and has resolved to maintain its strong **objection** to this application on the following additional grounds:

1. Proximity of the site to the village of Shorncote and the environmental risks to the village in terms of flooding and noise.
2. The lack of a thorough plan for managing the rise in ground water and surface water levels to prevent flooding in the low-lying villages of Shorncote and Somerford Keynes following the infill of the site with impermeable material.
3. Failure to comply with the pre-application community consultancy procedures in accordance with PPG.25 and Gloucestershire County Council's own Statement of Community Involvement.
4. The proposed site being judged as unsuitable for gravel extraction in the current minerals plan.

This letter details the Parish Council's reasoning for the above grounds for objection.

Hydrology

The Addendum to the Hydrological Baseline Study produced by GWP Consultants for the applicants is in response to serious questions posed by the Environmental Agency (EA), viz:

1. Change in groundwater flows from baseline as a result of the placement of low permeability fill within the gravels

The addendum accepts that there will be a rise in groundwater levels to the north of the site due to the imposition of low permeability fill. It suggests that this is only 20% of an assumed line of gravel aquifer running east west along the northern edge of the site. This also assumes that the remaining 80% of the gravel aquifer is available as a conduit. An examination of the situation as actually now exists would show that the majority width of this imaginary line has been subject to extraction and has also been subject to profiling using low permeability fill. The premise of this answer, the Parish Council believes, is therefore based on wrong assumptions.

2. Identification of other low permeability fill sites within the local area and the possible impacts that they will have on predicted change of groundwater flow.

This answer is vague and is obviously not based on actual knowledge. Lakes 31 & 32 are *suggested* to have been dug sometime between 1924 & 1973. The extensive uncompleted extraction north and east of Lake 31 by the Hills Group, some of which has been backfilled and all which will be subject to backfilling and profiling, is not detailed. The extension of extraction north of that site onto Dryleaze Farm is the only extraction mentioned. The Gloucester Sand & Gravel site west of Spratsgate Lane is *thought* to have been completed. This whole answer is of little use and it is no surprise that it states; “...*it has not been possible to assess the impact of existing and historical low permeability fill placement...*” This gives great cause for concern.

3. The localised rise in groundwater levels as a result of the change in groundwater flow

This answer is based on the actual readings from tube wells of groundwater maxima and is not disputed. The assumptions however made about the ground levels north of the site are obviously in error. Based on the Ordnance Survey Explorer Map no.169 at a scale of 1:25000 the actual height of the northern edge of the site is approximately 91.0 mAOD not 93.0 mAOD. The spot heights marked on the OS map at the cross roads north of the site and in the centre of Shorncote are 92 mAOD (approximately 250m from the northern edge of the site). This makes a nonsense of the addendum which gives an elevation 250m north of the site (Shorncote) as 94.7 mAOD, a difference of 2.7m (almost 9ft.). It goes on to assert that the predicted rise in groundwater levels north of the site could be accommodated by the *expected* rise in topography; this would, if using the predicted figures put Shorncote 1.84m (6ft) under water. The assumption that the hydraulic gradient is constant provides a very elementary analysis of the data.

4. The increase in flow or water levels for nearby surface watercourses and water bodies along the boundary of the site to see if they have sufficient capacity to cope with additional water.

It is accepted in the addendum that there will be an increase in surface groundwater north of the site some of which would be directed towards the ditches along Spratsgate Lane; *“An increase in water levels in these ditches could occur following placement of low permeability fill on the site.”* It is assumed that water from the ditch on the east side of Spratsgate Lane only infiltrates through the sand and gravel into the ditch on the west side. Whilst this is true it ignores the newly restored culvert under the lane which interconnects the two ditches. This was recently improved to help alleviate the existing flood problems at Shorncote. To add more flood water to the ditch on the west side of Spratsgate Lane (County Ditch) could cause an increase in the risk of flooding in Water Lane, Somerford Keynes. There is a history of flooding from the County Ditch which is not addressed by the addendum.

5. The risk of groundwater levels emerging at surface from this change in groundwater flow.

The addendum states that; *“There is a potential risk of groundwater flooding; although the predicted rise in groundwater levels up-gradient (north and north-west) of the proposed site has been assessed and is considered too small to cause groundwater flooding.”* If reference is made to the inaccuracies in the answer to Question 3 above it is obvious that this has not been adequately addressed.

6. Mitigation proposals where groundwater emerges is highlighted as a risk.

The only solutions offered are the digging, deepening and extending of new and existing ditches. There are no calculations given to justify the claims that this will be adequate.

The Parish Council consider that this addendum does not adequately address the concerns of either the EA or the Parish Council. It is surprising therefore that, whilst it is acknowledged in the EA letter that hydrological issues are complex on this site, it would appear that a response deadline has prompted the removing the EA objection *“for the purpose of granting planning permission”*. The Parish Council believes that the EA has effectively handed over responsibility for setting and monitoring the surface and groundwater flood risk to the Mineral Planning Authority by the imposition of two suggested recommended conditions. The Parish Council is very concerned at the abrogation of the responsibility by the EA on this very contentious issue where local dwellings are very much at risk from flooding from this site.

The EA response: Groundwater Protection and flood risk

Drainage Condition

The EA proposes a Drainage Condition which says that prior to commencement of extraction a scheme is approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority for ground and surface water drainage for the end use of the site. This scheme apparently shall include:

- Calculations for the likely rise in groundwater levels and the volume of groundwater needed to be drained.
- Details of storage available within local ditches and lakes and any changes needed to accommodate additional water.
- Details of how the scheme will be maintained and managed.

In the EA reasoning it says:

“...the applicant rightly concludes that infilling activities associated with the development may produce a rise in groundwater levels that poses a risk of groundwater flooding”.

All these calculations, mitigation and monitoring arrangements are apparently only to be completed after planning permission is granted.

Shorncote has already suffered from surface water flooding and this is likely to be exacerbated by, not only infilling but also, the bunding proposed on the northern edge of the site during extraction. Flooding from the County Ditch to the west of the site (a proposed drainage site) has also caused flooding downstream in Water Lane, Somerford Keynes.

The Parish Council strongly believe that these issues must be addressed prior to the granting of any planning permission to prevent the flooding of properties.

In the addendum to the EA letter with regards to this condition it gives the following advice;

“Development Control may want to look at the hydrological addendum and determine if additional drainage to the ditches could increase surface water flood risk and if the above condition is acceptable.”

In other words they are not sure.

Monitoring Condition

Again this is to be put in place after the granting of permission. The reason given is to assess the risk of changes in groundwater levels during extraction. One risk may well be the flooding of local properties. This risk assessment needs to be done prior to the granting of permission. If flooding should occur then who takes responsibility, obviously not the EA.

There is also another recommended condition with regard to afteruse.

Restoration Condition

This apparently recognises that afteruse proposals may change over time. The main justification given by the applicants for this extraction application, which is not an area of search, is that it will be an adjunct to Keynes Country Park. It will not only give additional car parking but also give more nature conservation areas. If this is to be changed then a clear indication of what alternative proposals are possible needs to be made.

The last sentence in the EA letter does not inspire confidence in their stance regarding the protection of local people from detrimental environmental impact;

“Finally we advise that you attach any operational conditions you see fit...”

The Parish Council maintains its strong objection to this application on hydrological grounds and wishes it to be recorded that it has no faith in the proposed protection to the locality with regards to surface and groundwater flooding.

Noise

There is little change here from the earlier documentation except that during the bund construction there is a lowering of the predicted noise level at Old Manor Farm from 70dB (A) $L_{Aeq,1hour}$ to 52dB(A) $L_{Aeq,1hour}$. This is interesting as the other two sites still show a noise level of 70-72dB(A) $L_{Aeq,1hour}$ during bund construction. There is no explanation of how this significant change is to be achieved. It is still recognised (paragraph 5.5 & 5.6) that it would be difficult to achieve the limit of 10 dB(A) above existing ambient levels *“without imposing unreasonable burdens on the mineral operator”*. The World Health Organisation Guidelines recommend a maximum outdoor sound level of 50 dB(A) L_{Aeq} to prevent the majority of people becoming moderately annoyed; a level of 55 dB(A) L_{Aeq} , **which is proposed**, would apparently cause serious annoyance. This level of noise is not acceptable. Paragraph 7.28 also suggests that a noise level of 72 dB(A) is acceptable in Keynes Country Park during bund construction as this area is only accessible to people hiring boats. This is untrue as the footpath / cycleway along that side of the park is freely available at all times of the year.

Dust

The new Assessment of Environmental Dust is much improved from the original document which was inaccurate in several respects. It is regrettable that after the failure of the original dust pad outside Old Manor Farm in 2006 the opportunity was not made to take a further reading in the intervening three years. Paragraph 4.6 correctly identifies Old Manor Barn as being the nearest dwelling but fails to mention the other 9 houses in Shorncote (all within 400m); all categorised as of medium sensitivity. It also refers to winds in the south west quadrant and to the dwellings being north of the extraction site. A large proportion of the winds are in fact from the south/south south west, a direction in line with Shorncote and from a usually dry direction. It must be emphasised that the issue of the highly irritating effect of windblown dust was highlighted in an addendum to the Report of the Government Inspector regarding the removal of this site from the Minerals Local Plan (The Planning Inspectorate Report - GMLP - 6th June 2002 Para C46).

Pre-application Community Consultation

The Parish Council is very concerned that the requirements of PPG.25 and the GCC's own procedures have not been followed in this application with regards to Community Consultation. It is clearly defined (GCC Statement of Community Involvement - Appendix E) that where criteria involving Environmental Impact are concerned a pre-application consultation discussion is recommended. If this is not carried out a statement setting out reasons for this lack of consultation should be submitted as part of the application.

This application involves environmental impact in regards to Keynes Country Park, with regards to increased traffic, with regards to the impact on local settlements of Shorncote and Somerford Keynes and particularly with the increased risk of flooding to properties.

Recent extraction applications have clearly complied with the rules; the Dryleaze Application by Hills Aggregates held pre-application public meetings at Siddington; the recent application for gravel extraction on land owned by the Co-op near Latton (partly in Gloucestershire) also held extensive pre-application meetings. Why then were they not held for the Shorncote site?

The Parish Council would like an explanation as to why the correct procedure has not been carried out nor apparently insisted on by Development Control.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Muriel Watkins,

Clerk, Somerford Keynes Parish Council