

THE DONKEY FIELD.

Neston and Westwells Action Group (NWAG) have now received replies to some of our formal complaints. We are in the process of analysing the feedback from Wiltshire County Council (WCC) Planning Authority and the Environmental Agency (EA). At first analysis there is little meaningful data provided by either of them. The EA perceives that surface water flooding is a WCC responsibility, and it seems the EA is only interested in flooding generated by rivers and the sea. It rather makes a mockery of the Ark statement in their initial planning application that the EA did not consider there was a risk of flooding on the Donkey Field! They just neglected to mention the rest of the statement seeing that there was no risk from rivers or seas! Likewise, it appears that the Ministry of Defence (MOD) consultee who was approached by the planning department, to comment on the flood risk and the underground workings was an officer responsible for airfield safety. Therefore, his only concern was the height of the building. Consequently the statement made by Ark that the MoD had no objection to the development was pretty much wholly irrelevant in that context. Another example is WCC determination to hang on to the proposition that the Donkey Field was owned by the MOD. This is despite written evidence, from WCC own archives, demonstrating that the land has never been MOD property. Proof perhaps that inconvenient truths are just ignored by the planners. These are just three examples of the continuous misdirection that permeates most written documentation provided by the developer and put forward by the planners. It appears that no matter how much evidence the planning department is provided with, they can form an opinion and cherry pick whatever they want from the application documents to support that opinion, rather than follow local strategic policies. So, if the Strategic committee members, at the meeting, don't ask the right questions, and the planners don't inform them of other evidence provided from organisations like ours, then the application is accepted. Shocking don't you think!

It's not all negative, Wessex Water (WW) and the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) have recognised that the local flood water threat is 'real' and something very peculiar is going on with the local drains. The LLFA has pointed out to Ark that in respect of their offsite discharge drains *"Evidence suggests that these systems may have been altered or connected without formal approval, and that significant volumes of surface water could be entering compromised private drains downstream of your site"*. Ark responded *"As identified by the drainage officer, evidence would suggest that the connections and alterations made have been done by other developments unrelated to Ark without approval and the council should investigate the matter further."* So, it appears that even Ark agree that something 'shonky' is going on with the drains and water from their site may be going down them, but if the drains are cross connected, *'it wasn't them that done it'*. They just never bothered to check where the water was going and in the case of the development on the old Stephens Plastics sites just happened (by

mistake perhaps?) to have applied to send even more water the same way. Hello! Only 10 years ago some houses here in Westwells were flooded, does nobody care.

Corsham Town Council have not heard back from their complaint to WCC over the proposal by Ark to use the Donkey Field as a building site. The site would be used for approximately two years for the construction of Data Centre No 6 (on the old Stephens Plastics site.) This would be a means of getting around the planning conditions placed on that approval. The reply is a long time in coming as WCC seem to be answering everyone in slow time, so don't hold your breath.

In the interim Ark are trying now to avoid having any conditions placed on their planning application. NWAG are pushing back to ensure that they do. In the meantime, we are also going to raise a Stage 2 formal complaint to WCC.

Ark Data Centres (the UK-based operator) is still up for sale. Its majority owner, US hedge Fund Elliott Investment Management, formally engaged advisors to explore a sale last September, but so far no takers. This could explain why Ark is wishing to window dress the planning applications without doing any work. It might also explain why the Ark senior revenue officer got so cranky at the Strategic Planning meeting last December? Its good to know that we are getting under the skin of the developers, it might give them a sense of how we feel about them.

We will keep you updated as events occur. But in the meantime, enjoy the blue skies sunshine and the Neston Fete.

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