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14 April 2015

Dear Anthony

RE: SOUTHWELL FLOOD ALLEVIATION – PROGRESS ON SOUTHWELL FLOODING MODEL AND ASSOCIATED WORKS

I refer to a previous letter dated 5 February 2015 from your predecessor, Mr Burrows, regarding the above, which was in reply to my earlier correspondence dated 21 January 2015. Since Mr Burrow's letter, the Beckett's Field planning application has been re-presented to the District Council's Planning Committee. As part of the Committee's discussions, it was resolved that I write to you formally to set out some concerns as a matter of public record. The Chairman of Planning Committee, Cllr David Payne also formally supported this stance.

I will not fully rehearse our shared concerns regarding Southwell and specifically the need to address wider flooding issues following the events of July 2013. Indeed I note and welcome the confirmation that the Southwell Flood Alleviation scheme is supported and thus, I trust, will be delivered within the 6 year National programme (ending 2020/21). The matter on which I write is specifically with respect to the production of the baseline information to support this programme, notably the hydraulic model (also known, I understand, as the URS/AECOM Model). This is all set against the backdrop of my final paragraph in my 21 January letter in terms of the need to ensure credibility is not eroded and that good working relationships amongst various organisations are not damaged any further.

I am sure you will recall the joint press release between NSDC, NCC, and the EA back in November 2013 (a copy is attached for completeness) which set out the approach to dealing with planning applications within Southwell. This made clear that flood studies, which included the model work, would be completed in April 2014. It was on this basis that NSDC agreed that significant planning applications would not be determined until such time that NCC had published its information (the model) unless the applicants themselves undertook work to convince the flood risk authorities that a development proposal was acceptable.

At the Planning Committee meeting on 25th March it was made clear to all Members by our Officers that the hydraulic flood model had been completed by NCC, albeit its outputs in terms of reference case(s) were not available for public consumption. What was surprising was that the applicants on the Beckett's field application, Miller Homes, made a request to run their proposed development through the hydraulic model. In reply (via AECOM who I understand built it on your behalf), they were advised that the model was not the appropriate mechanism to use to assess flood impacts given that the more detailed site-specific work undertaken was better refined.

The Members therefore found themselves to be in difficulty in two regards. Firstly, that a hydraulic model, which members of the community not unsurprisingly thought would assist in offering certainty for new developments had been produced but was not available publicly and would not be available (if at all) until after Peer Review in May - over 12 months later than originally thought. Secondly, that the model was of absolutely no assistance in understanding the impact of a specific development proposal.

As I am sure you will appreciate members of the community in Southwell are relying on the hydraulic model, not unreasonably, to be able to offer comfort on not only the design of any Flood Alleviation scheme, as part of the 6 year National Programme, but also, as importantly, to offer confidence when looking at new development. Officers of the County Council have in the past suggested to NSDC and the Flood Forum that the model could be used in this way. Indeed, the Draft Neighbourhood Plan for Southwell includes a policy based on this assumption, something which I note NCC has not objected to in their formal response.

A 12 month delay on a model which remains unpublished is unacceptable. This is made more so if the model cannot assist the Planning Authority and importantly the community in understanding the flooding impacts of a particular scheme.

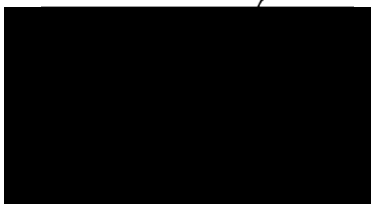
NSDC remains committed to working with the community and NCC to ensure that when development does take place it is adequately controlled. To do this, I would hope that we can address two key factors. Firstly that peer review of the hydraulic model is completed in May as committed in your Council's previous letter. Of course, the model - or at least its outputs in terms of a baseline position - would need to be published to offer the community the necessary confidence. Secondly, that you set out how the hydraulic model could assist, if at all, in assessing planning applications. Indeed, now that NCC is a statutory consultee on flood matters for major applications I assume that you may have need to call on the model yourself.

I must make you aware that the Secretary of State is currently considering whether to call-in the Beckett's Field application to be determined by way of a Public Inquiry. Should this happen I am sure you will be asked, not only by my colleagues in Development Management but also potentially by an Appointed Inspector directly, to assist the Inquiry in consideration of flooding matters. Again, this will be especially the case now that NCC is a statutory consultee.

I trust this letter adequately clarifies the current position and I look forward to receiving your considered response in due course.

Kind regards.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Roger Blaney
Leader of the Council

Enc

Copy to Cllr David Payne – Chairman, NSDC Planning Committee