

THATCHAM NEWS

Residents upset over gates

Fears that access to Memorial Playing Fields could be impeded by locks

RESIDENTS have objected to a proposed change to the ongoing flood defence works in Thatcham, which are nearing completion.

Ardent Consulting Engineers, acting on behalf of West Berkshire Council (WBC), has applied to add a fence with lockable gates across the Memorial Playing Fields.

But residents fear their access to the fields and other areas of the town will be impeded if the addition of the gates goes ahead.

In a letter to WBC, dated December 5, Ardent explained: "Following discussion with the landowner, it was requested that a fence with gated access would be installed to separate the flood alleviation scheme lands from the Thatcham Memorial Foundation (TMF) land being retained post scheme completion.

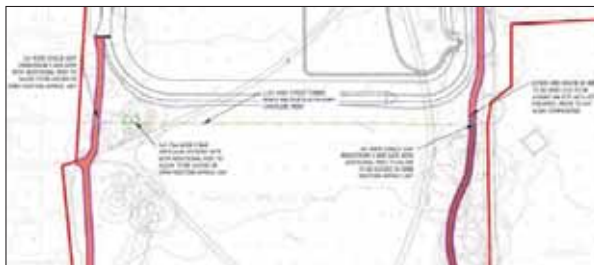
"The footpath was realigned to minimise ecological impacts at the site, as well as minimising tree disturbance and tree removal required."

Ardent initially tried to submit the change as a non-material amendment to the original planning application, but the district council refused, saying that footpaths and accessibility represented "repeated issues" for the public.

And they weren't wrong.

The proposed gates have received 19 objections on the council's planning portal.

One comment read: "The public



The flood alleviation scheme in the Memorial Playing Fields, top, with a thin line showing where the fence would be, with gates on either side

should have access to this green open space at all times to enable them to enjoy the benefits it brings to physical and mental wellbeing."

"I think it is terrible that walking access to vital services like doctors is being blocked for residents of north west Thatcham," added another.

"They will soon have no choice but to drive if this important route is obstructed."

Another comment read: "This raises concerns about whether the gates are actually needed, and whether there is a risk they may

"I think it is terrible that walking access to vital services like doctors is being blocked for residents of north west Thatcham"

eventually be kept closed at all times, as has happened with the other entrance leading to Beverley Close."

The footpath to the field from Beverley Close remains closed – despite appearing open on the plans – and the path by the town war memorial was also previously bricked up.

Thatcham Town Council recommended the proposal for refusal at its planning meeting on Tuesday last week.

Committee chairman Simon Pike (Lib Dem, Thatcham West) said: "Obviously, in the view of consulting engineers, the changes are minor. But in the view of residents, they take a different view."

"There's no justification given in the application as to why the gates are necessary."

"Therefore, it has potential to

harmfully impact that connectivity."

But it added it would withdraw its objection if an amended plan was submitted without the gates, and conditions added to the decision notice to ensure connectivity is restored on the completion of the works.

A condition in the original application for the flood defence works stated the footpaths should be provided within one month of the completion of the works, and that the connectivity the field provides to residents must not be harmfully impacted by the development.

In a previous statement to the *Newbury Weekly News*, chairman of the TMF Nathan Gregory said: "Following the advice of the foundation's surveyor and solicitor, a fence will be placed to delineate the retained Thatcham Memorial Playing Fields and the area being purchased by West Berkshire Council."

"This will be installed as part of the flood alleviation scheme and is not being undertaken by the foundation."

"Pedestrian gates are required in the fence to link to the new perimeter path."

But it is not yet clear how often the gates will be kept open and accessible for the public.

The TMF has been approached for further clarification.

The application is due to be decided by March.

THATCHAM

Keeping in touch

Have you got a story? Contact our Thatcham reporter MIREK GOSNEY on (01635) 886637 or email: mirek.gosney@newburynews.co.uk Twitter @mgosney_nwn



News updates from Thatcham are now available online throughout the week. Go to newburytoday.co.uk and select the district pages

newburytoday.co.uk

Event officers wanted

THATCHAM Town Council is hiring for two part-time events officers.

Both will work closely with the events manager to plan, coordinate and deliver Thatcham's programme of community and civic events, including its annual Family Fun Day.

Visit the Thatcham Town Council website to apply.

Charged with four thefts

A THATCHAM man has been arrested and charged with four counts of theft.

Liam Watkins, 27, of Halifax Place, was charged with four counts of theft from a vehicle.

He appeared at Reading Magistrates' Court on Wednesday last week and was remanded to appear at the same court on Tuesday.

Almshouse flat vacancy

A ONE-bedroom, single occupancy flat is available for someone in housing need in Thatcham.

Thatcham Parochial Almshouse Charity has a compact, one-bedroom first-floor single occupancy flat available in Thatcham.

The charity has said applicants must be over the age of 55, in housing need and able to live independently.

They must also currently live in either Thatcham, Greenham, Cold Ash or Midgham.

There is an accessible entrance to the building and a stairlift to the upper flat from the entrance hall.

The flat is self-contained, unfurnished and newly carpeted and consists of its own front door, hallway, living room, fitted kitchen, bedroom and bathroom with a shower.

The charity provides a cooker,



An enclosed rear courtyard garden available for residents to use in Chapel Street, Thatcham

fridge and washing machine.

There is also an enclosed rear courtyard garden for the residents to use.

There are no designated car parking spaces available with this accommodation.

Priority will be given to the applicant with the greatest housing need.

Application forms and further information are available upon request from clerk to the trustees, Jackie Davis, Central Family Hub, Park Lane, Thatcham, RG18 3PG.

Alternatively, call (01635) 863351 or email thatchamcharities@btinternet.com for more information.

Chinese New Year market

COME and celebrate the Year of the Snake at Thatcham's Chinese New Year Market.

Thatcham Town Council is inviting residents to join its first Chinese New Year Market in The Broadway on Sunday, February 2.

More than 10 stalls will be serving a range of delicacies from 10am until 4pm, including Japanese dumplings and bento boxes, authentic rice balls with fillings, as well as Thai, Indonesian, Taiwanese and Hong Kong

dishes, Chinese street food and an array of sweet treats and desserts.

The market will also showcase unique crafts, jewellery and handmade accessories and home and beauty products created by Asian traders.

But the highlight is expected to be the traditional Lion Dance, which brings good luck and drives away evil spirits.

This dance will be performed at 11am and 12.30pm, starting outside the Costa.

Everyone is welcome to attend.



Lion dance

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