CYPRESS GARDENS PLANNING ISSUES

My name is Kelly Bartlett; I am the owner of 4 Cypress Gardens, Longlevens and the chair of the Longlevens Flood Committee.

Since flooding in both June and July 2007 we have been forced as a community to investigate why our estate was hit so badly and indeed in such an isolated manner in the June.

There are many contributory factors to flooding and we certainly have many issues that contribute to the severity of our flooding. However, all of these issues would not be prevalent had the estate been built to reflect it’s proximity to a water course.

I have personally spent hours at the planning office looking through files and have found many reports with recommendations for the site that have clearly not been carried out. Full planning should not have been granted. The council are negligent for not checking that areas of the planning consent were fulfilled. The site was known to flood and no flood risk strategy was employed.

The main items of negligence are the following;

Flap Valve/ Drainage System: Our road/ surface drains collect water beneath the roads, expelling into the Horsbere Brook. The planning clearly details that a flap valve must be installed at the exit point into the brook. This was never installed and therefore as the level of the water in the brook rises it is free to flow straight back under the road and up out of the road drains. Thereby flooding the road before the brook bursts. The flap valve has been installed since we flooded and shows the drainage system to be totally unfit for purpose. The situation we now have is that the valve shuts off when the water level is high, not enabling the water to flow back into the vats, however, all of the excess surface water has nowhere to go so the road floods due to the amount collected beneath. Our surface drainage is dependent upon the brook level, this is not acceptable. With the proved susceptibility we face, there needs to be an alternative drainage system that works independently of the brook. A new estate should be given adequate drainage and we do not have this.

Gas pipe: There was a gas pipe into our estate that was encased in a concrete girder attached to the bridge that used to cross the brook. During our first flood in June the concrete girder and pipe broke away from the bridge and acted as a dam in the water. The Environment Agency have confirmed that this pipe does not and has never had permission to pass the water course. This should have been picked up by the council and not left for nearly 7 years to be discovered. Needless to say the gas pipe has since been removed and repositioned. The bridge itself has also been removed under EA emergency measures.

Foundations/ Level of the site: There are an abundance of geological reports on the site within the planning files. Many of these raise the issues of water seepages at low levels beneath the soil. They recommend a variety of foundations to be used dependent upon where the property would sit on the site. The Greyhound Gardens development that was built between 15-20 years earlier had to be back filled to reduce flood risk in order to get planning. Unfortunately the land that our estate is built on has not been raised; it was in fact lowered to save costs. As you drive into our estate you can clearly see the difference in the level. We are much lower than the surroundings. We are encased by higher ground which leaves us acting like a swimming pool, collecting and retaining water. Why did the council not enforce Bellway Homes to build the estate to the standards previously required on Greyhound Gardens?

Adoption: Our estate has still not been adopted and the council are going through this procedure presently. Our drainage system is below standard and there are many other items that appear to be controversial and are causing problems with the adoption going through. Our drains had not been cleared/ cleaned since the estate was built. Therefore, during our first flood in June, all of our surface drains were totally blocked with rubble, bricks, and shovels – basically everything they dumped when they left the site. The drains should never have been left in this condition and this definitely contributed towards to extent of our flood damage. Bellway Homes should be cleaning the drains regularly and they are not. I don’t think they have cleared the drains since the flood as the initial clean up was performed by the Highways Agency. The contractor for the HA told us that they were the worst drains he had ever seen. Furthermore, Bellway Homes are not mowing the estate (which still falls within their remit) and we resemble a meadow at present as the council have withdrawn from mowing the area.

There are numerous other issues that have come to light which I will be more than happy to discuss. We have bought our homes in good faith and paid market value for them. The estate was a transient one, it is not an area that people expected to live in long term. We are now stuck with homes that are worth less than we paid for them and with a constant threat of further flooding, all of which is affecting people’s mental health and general well being.

We want compensation for the situation we are in. Nobody deserves to face this. We all pay our rates and we trusted that we were buying quality properties with the protection of the council. We have been let down and we want answers and payment to reflect the blight on our homes.

Thank you.