

Water loss puts farm at risk after housing development work



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A Cambridgeshire grower with abstraction rights says his business is in jeopardy because intensive dewatering work to prepare a housing development site left his well dry and useless as a water source.

Clive Hayden, 65, has been forced to scale back production at Larksfield Nursery, near Longstanton in South Cambridgeshire, due to the “pitiful amount” of water available from his well.

The grower has been supplying New Covent Garden flower market, but is now trying to diversify into soft fruit and vegetables.



Clive Hayden Clive Hayden © Fews Lane Consortium

Work on the first phase of the Northstowe town development, located between Cambridge and St Ives, started in 2015 and the project will eventually deliver 10,000 new homes.

Local campaigners say the initial work to pump groundwater away, to prepare the land for building, which happened in summer 2015 and then in spring of 2016, has dried up Mr Hayden's well, as well as ponds in Longstanton.

Mr Hayden says his business is no longer sustainable. "We're doing everything making the most of what little water I have, but it is still not sufficient to keep the place going."

An independent report, commissioned by South Cambridgeshire District Council, concluded last year that construction work between 2015 and 2016 had lowered groundwater levels, and was to blame for emptying ponds in Longstanton.

Drought to blame?

But the developer L&Q Estates, which worked on phase one of the Northstowe project, denies it did anything wrong and instead points to longer-term drought conditions

An L&Q Estates spokesperson said: "Temporary dewatering of trenches was undertaken simply to allow the safe installation of foul and surface water drainage pipes.