

Fews  
Lane  
Consortium  
Ltd

29th NOVEMBER 2022

## **Press statement by Daniel Fulton, Director, Fews Lane Consortium Ltd**

It is with regret that I must announce that Fews Lane Consortium has decided to discontinue its judicial review proceedings challenging South Cambridgeshire District Council's planning permission for Northstowe Phase 3A. As our supporters will know, this has been a very difficult decision.

Our campaign started out strong and quickly found considerable support in the local community. As a local non-governmental organisation, Fews Lane Consortium depends entirely upon the community for support, and in these proceedings, hundreds of local residents came together to contribute more than £30,000 to our fight for environmental justice.

There are serious and well-founded concerns about the environmental impacts of Northstowe on groundwater, both in regard to the local aquifer in Longstanton and the aquifer that supports the River Cam and its chalk stream tributaries.

We had hoped that the defendant, South Cambridgeshire District Council, would be willing to engage on these issues in a meaningful way. Instead, the district council has merely continued to insist that it was legally entitled to ignore the environmental harm that is plainly visible in Longstanton's dry ponds and Cambridgeshire's disappearing chalk streams.

As I told our supporters at the very outset of this campaign, judicial review is only a procedural tool that can allow a decision to be taken again. To obtain an improved outcome, we absolutely needed to build a cohesive base of political support on the district council. Sadly, that base of political support never materialised.

Had Fews Lane Consortium continued in the proceedings and prevailed, as we expected to, Homes England's planning permission for 4,000 dwellings at Northstowe would have been quashed. This would have delayed the delivery of important community facilities for the town of Northstowe by years. However, with the district council unwilling to meaningfully engage on environmental issues, little practical benefit could be gained by obtaining a quashing order, which was the only relevant remedy available to the court. Taking into account all the relevant factors, the most sensible decision was not to continue with a 2-day trial seeking a remedy that would do more harm than good.

Discontinuing the claim saved the district council and Homes England from having to spend tens of thousands of pounds in legal costs for the 2-day trial, but discontinuing the claim had the major disadvantage of entitling the other parties to payment of some of their costs.

Homes England has decided not to collect any costs from Few's Lane Consortium. However, South Cambridgeshire District Council has had no such magnanimity.

Few's Lane Consortium had planned to use our remaining funds to obtain a much needed environmental investigation into the causes of the Northstowe groundwater collapse, but, as the district council has said, the council is legally entitled to collect our remaining funds, even if it stops a needed environmental investigation from proceeding. This is regrettable, but it is a political decision that is within the discretion of the relevant executive councillors, Cllr Bridget Smith, council leader, and Cllr Tumi Hawkins, executive councillor for planning.

Two new district councillors have recently been elected to represent Longstanton and Northstowe ward, and I know that they share residents' concerns about the environmental impacts of Northstowe. It will be up to them to try to find a path forward through the political process.

Lastly, I would like to thank Homes England for the professional and respectful way in which the agency has conducted itself throughout these proceedings. It is reassuring to know that the implementation of the planning permission is in the hands of a public authority that is committed to upholding the values of public service.

### About us

Few's Lane Consortium is a local non-governmental organisation based in South Cambridgeshire. We work with local communities to fight for improved outcomes in local governmental decision making relating to planning and the environment. Few's Lane Consortium operates on a not-for-profit basis and is supported entirely by the generosity of members of the communities we support.

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