

Thakeham Village - from Countryside to Concrete?



Proposed siting for retirement homes

The mushroom business – what has happened?

Here is a quick summary of events for those who are unsure of what has happened to the mushroom business and the proposed houses in Thakeham:

- 19 April 2011 – Horsham District Councillors agree to two applications for 146 houses in Thakeham and improvements at Sussex Mushrooms.

providing certain conditions are met. Experts warn that the company will not survive.

- July 2011 – Sussex Mushrooms goes into liquidation and Monaghan Mushrooms takes over. Good news – jobs are saved and economic benefits to the community continue.

- August 2011 – With the planning decision not yet ratified by Horsham District Council (HDC), their lawyers advise that the Council has to consider the applications afresh. The original reasons for approval - saving the mushroom business and local jobs with the help of money from housing development - have disappeared as a result of Monaghan's take-over.

Monaghan Mushrooms is one of the biggest producers of mushrooms and mushroom compost in Europe and will not need a capital injection having recently invested €100 million in equipment and improvements in its business and the jobs in Thakeham have been saved. The UK Farms Director of Monaghan's, John Hall, said:

"Monaghan Mushrooms are pleased to confirm that they have purchased the assets and taken over the people and management of Sussex Mushrooms.

Our principal objective is to develop a sustainable state of the art mushroom farm at Thakeham to serve SE England.

Details are being worked on but at this moment it is inappropriate to comment further as there are still a number of issues to be resolved.

In achieving our objective we would wish to make it clear that we want to work closely and in harmony with all our neighbours to meet the needs of local residents, employees and the business."

This is encouraging news. There has been a mushroom business in Thakeham for 99 years and Monaghan appears to be the company to take the business forward and bring prosperity and jobs. Why then would HDC still want to build 146 houses?

A fresh chance

By a stroke of luck, we have another chance to think about the impact on the village and the environment of so many houses. We can let our local Councillors know our opinion before the next planning decision is made.

There are many things to consider before accepting any housing development in such a rural area. Remember that Councillors are accountable not only to us but also towards a sustainable future: *"aiming to meet human needs while preserving the environment so that these needs can be met not only in the present, but also for generations to come"* (Report by the World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Commission): *Our Common Future UN (11/12/1987)*)

The strains on local infrastructure, the nature of the housing proposed and its suitability for a rural village all need to be considered. Should homes be built near town centres and employment or can Thakeham carry the extra environmental burden as residents constantly travel to shops, amenities and places of work?

In the Planning Officer's original report to the Council, the Abingworth proposal was described as having many shortcomings, including a **'ghetto style atmosphere'**, a **'suburban housing style'** not suitable for the location and a **'cramped and over developed'** urban character and environment.



Example of a local housing estate

Is this really what we want? Will we sacrifice 80 acres of green land in return for one small shop, a pre-school without its woodland and a cricket pitch compromised by size? Have you thought about where you walk the dog, fly a kite and have the Village Day? This relaxed and green part of Thakeham will be lost forever and the impact on air quality and traffic will be significant.

What happens next?

TVA recently spoke to the HDC Planning Officer who confirmed that matters could not move forward until Monaghan had considered all the issues involved.

As we see it, there are several options – some desirable, some not. What do you think? What would you like to happen? Some possible scenarios are:

- Monaghan Mushrooms thrives on the Chesswood site and the landowners accept responsibility for cleaning up the Abingworth site. Ideal, but possibly unrealistic.
- Monaghan Mushrooms thrives but HDC still approves the currently proposed housing development. Result: 146 houses and possibly more in the future.
- Monaghan Mushrooms struggles with the business and leaves. We are then left with an uncertain future or even dereliction for both sites.
- Monaghan Mushrooms thrives on the Chesswood site and HDC accepts a more forward-thinking and reduced housing plan appropriate for local needs and meeting the requirements for a sustainable future, cleaning up the Abingworth site in the process.
- HDC approves 146 houses, then Monaghan Mushrooms leaves, resulting in a poorly designed housing estate and derelict sites. A worst case scenario, but what's to stop it happening?

Have your say!

As soon as we hear about new or revised planning applications, TVA will call for a public meeting with our local Councillors, David Jenkins, Roger Arthur and Philip Circus to hear what their thoughts are on the future of Thakeham and its housing needs. They all voted in favour of the applications and we need to hear from them the justification for their votes and how they intend to vote this time. You will also be able to put forward your own views.

Be prepared to have your say when the planning applications are submitted. In the meantime, you can also write to your local Councillors or to the HDC Planning Department and let them know your views on the future. Tell them what you would like to see in our village.

Write letters to the local press, such as the West Sussex County Times. You can also contact TVA on thakehamva@yahoo.org.uk to get more involved.

If we do or say nothing, we will waste this chance to make everyone think again. Let's all work together for a Thakeham which both present and future generations can enjoy.

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Possible example of views over the fields for the months while the housing development construction is underway