Fowl play: why this huge chicken farm has no place by the River Kennet

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Seriously clucked off

As local residents lucky enough to live in Berkshire's beautiful Kennet Valley we are seriously clucked off by the recent planning application from the landowner – the Sutton's Estate – **to locate a 32,000 bird intensive poultry unit** at Bradfords Farm in a field designated AONB (National Landscape), on the edge of the floodplain **just 200 metres from the River Kennet**, SSSI. It beggars belief that Sir Richard Sutton Limited, a large commercial concern owning luxury hotels in London, and approximately 16,000 acres of land in UK, together with land in Ohio, US, couldn't find somewhere more appropriate to locate their potentially polluting chicken factory.

We live very close to this site where we enjoy walking by the river and watching the abundant

wildlife. The thought that this treasured river, already under stress, will be put at further risk is completely unacceptable. Fortunately our campaign to fight off this threat to our environment and the potential damage to the River Kennet, **one of only 200 chalk streams in the world**, has prompted welcome and **highly effective support from anglers, wildlife enthusiasts and organisations** whose mission it is to care about our endangered environment.

The River Kennet in Newbury © Steve Daniels

The game changer

Initially the objectors **numbered a few dozen local residents** but once we reached out to the likes

of **River Action** and the **Angling Trust** the campaign really began to motor. Local angling clubs such as Newbury AA and Reading & District mobilised their members to the extent that there are **now 232 formal objections**. The Angling Trust made representations to both the Environment Agency and Natural England who have sent in comprehensive lists of concerns with the EA now escalating theirs to a formal objection. This, we feel, **really could be a 'game changer**'.

We asked the applicants to a public meeting at which we were grateful to have the articulate support of **James Wallace** from **River Action**, **Anna Forbes** from **Action for the River Kennel (ARK)** – our local **River Trust, Martin Salter** (Head of Policy, Angling Trust) and various locals with knowledge of planning, avian flu and law. It seemed to us that the applicant's representatives were very ill prepared and unable to answer many questions. **Fish Legal and Solicitors Leigh Day have also given valuable advice.**

The case

Our case is simply this –

We support responsible farming but this poultry unit on the proposed site would be an **environmental disaster for the river.**
Massive egg production units like this **should be nowhere near any river** and this applicant has plenty of environmentally more suitable land.
The only reasons given for the applicant selecting this field is its **proximity to the farm manager's house** and **convenient supply of electricity!**
If permitted, the **precedent will be set** and all the other fields along the Kennet Valley owned by the applicant **will have units for 32,000 chickens**. When asked this particular question the **applicant's representatives were unable to guarantee that this would be the only one.**
The applicants have recently submitted a wholly inadequate Manure Management Plan. They rely on their "circular farming" system which, in simple terms, means collecting waste from the unit, transporting it to another of their nearby farms for storage and then spreading it on land where they grow the grain to feed the chickens. This **toxic waste** has been legally classified as "industrial waste" and must be treated as such.
Hard evidence from the terminal decline of famous rivers such as the River Wye and Severn demonstrates that, far from being custodians of the land, many farmers cannot be trusted to look after habitats and water courses.

The LPA cannot allow this abomination

At the start of this campaign **we felt everything was a struggle** and that we were up against an applicant with sufficiently deep pockets that every point we raised would just be given to an expensive consultant for response. Fortunately the expensive consultant's various reports were so inadequate that even we lay people could see there really was **no justifiable reason for this poultry unit in this location**, so close to the river.

Clearly the **Environment Agency** – rather better qualified than us to judge – **found their reports more than inadequate** and has **formally objected in strong terms**. We are not there yet but with the EA's support, and hopefully that of **Natural England** too, the **local planning authority (LPA) surely cannot allow this abomination.**