

## **SAVE OUR ISLAND ARTICLE FOR SEPTEMBER 2023 HAYLING HERALD**

### **Southern Water's application to drill two boreholes in Bidbury Park, Bedhampton to test the ground conditions APP/23/00004**

At the Planning Meeting on 20 July 2023, we witnessed the subtle power of the Officers of Havant Borough Council over the Committee Members.

Southern Water have previously presented a proposal to build a reverse osmosis plant to treat the waste water output from Budds Farm and pipe it to the planned Havant Thicket Reservoir, and then distribute the water across the Portsmouth Water area and also to Southern Water Southampton.

Portsmouth Water are on record as stating to the Scrutiny Board that the use of this reclaimed drinking water would only happen in emergency situations and periods of drought. However, Portsmouth Water have stated that their serviced area water supply is under severe stress. This situation does not point to the infrequent use indicated.

HBC has strongly opposed the plan because Southern Water have a poor service record (a £90 million fine in 2022) and are a major polluter of our harbours, and also withheld key information on the new reverse osmosis plant works from HBC.

With a normal development application, the Officers would base their recommendations on the purpose, benefits, risks and alternatives considered. But not in this case. The primary justification made "the determination of this application for investigation alone does not prejudice the Council's view on that project." [i.e. the reverse osmosis plant & Havant Thicket] The Officer's comment on the deliberation report says: "The ground investigation works at Bidbury Lane were not delivering part of the water recycling project."

The wording of the Application allowed the Officers to advise the Committee Members that they were not permitted to question or debate the purpose, justification or benefits of the reason for this Application.

Southern Water propose to drill two boreholes in Bidbury Park to test the ground conditions for the reverse osmosis plant in an as yet unknown surface location, and the associated piping network to and from the Havant Thicket Reservoir. One 20cm borehole goes down 60mtrs into the aquifer. This is more likely to relate to an investigation into the flow capacity of the aquifer, but we will never know.

In addition, the Officers required to answer all of the Committee Members' questions regarding the impact to the environment, the impact on the Park's Sports Club users, and a request for a rule to restore the land with legal enforcement capability were not present – and the questions remain unanswered.

The Committee Members were also advised at the meeting that if they chose not to take the Officers' advice, they would be required to provide detailed reasons. After all this, the Committee Members then voted in support of the application without reviewing any justifications.

This meeting raises governance warning signs. There is an overwhelming case to investigate the process which concluded without any justification or any ability to question or debate the proposal and the subsequent approval.

**Dave Parham**