PL/26/0204 - Caversham Park, Peppard Road
Caversham and District Residents' Association (CADRA) objects to the approval of Details Reserved by Condition 9 (Waste Water Network Capacity) of planning permission ref. PL/22/0409.

We are commenting on the wastewater capacity implications of the proposed redevelopment of Caversham Park into a care home with associated new housing. Our comments concern Thames Water's pre planning response (08 April 2025) which the applicant has provided as the reason for approval of the condition and the opinion given by the Environment Agency at the recent examination of RBC's Local Plan Partial Update (LPPU).

We disagree with statement recently made by Thames Water on this condition for the following reasons.

1. Capacity in the local foul sewer network is adequate – but only up to the Sewage Treatment Works (STW)
Thames Water confirms that "there will be sufficient sewerage capacity in the adjacent foul water sewer network to serve your development between the site and the downstream sewerage treatment works."

However, this confirmation is conditional and time limited. Thames Water also states that any increase in the number or density of homes could invalidate this assessment.
Given that the application has evolved over time, the Council should ensure that the final submitted scheme matches the flows assessed by Thames Water.

2. Reading (Manor Farm) Sewage Treatment Works does not currently have capacity to serve the development
This is the most significant part of the letter. Thames Water states unequivocally that:
"The receiving network is served by Reading (Manor Farm) STW and there isn't capacity to serve the development currently."

"Sewage Treatment Upgrades are likely to be required to accommodate the proposed development."
They go on to recommend a Grampian-style condition preventing occupation until either:

- all required STW upgrade works are completed, or
- a housing and infrastructure phasing plan is agreed with Thames Water.

This is a material planning consideration. Without such a condition, the development risks contributing to sewage flooding or pollution incidents—risks explicitly identified by Thames Water.

3. Environment Agency Recent Evidence to RBC LPPU
The Environment Agency (EA) has now made clear that Reading Sewage Treatment Works is operating far closer to its true capacity than previously understood, and that the Local Plan's reliance on an MDV permit figure has materially overstated the headroom available. Their evidence to the Reading Local Plan examination states that Reading STW has exceeded its DWF equivalent flow in three of the last four years, that the current MDV permit is not suitable for assessing the impacts of growth, and that upgrades to the treatment works and wider network are required before further development is connected.

The EA has consequently withdrawn support for RBC's LPPU growth evidence, emphasising that additional loading risks rising main and pumping station failures and further environmental harm to the already vulnerable Foudry Brook.

In practical terms, this means that until Thames Water delivers confirmed capacity upgrades, the network cannot be assumed to accommodate additional foul flows from new development, including this proposal.

4. Timing of upgrades
Thames Water notes that upgrades to Reading STW are "planned… programmed for completion by 2028."

Given the scale of the proposed care home and residential units, and the likelihood of phased occupation before 2028, the Council must ensure that no occupation occurs ahead of confirmed treatment capacity.

5. Surface water drainage remains unresolved Thames Water confirms that no surface water information was provided and that connection to the public sewer will only be considered once the applicant has demonstrated compliance with the drainage hierarchy and obtained LLFA approval.

This is a further matter requiring resolution before determination.

Conclusion
Thames Water response and the Environment Agency's LPPU evidence now makes the position unambiguous. Thames Water has confirmed that while the immediate local sewer network may be able to convey flows, Reading Sewage Treatment Works cannot currently treat additional load, and upgrades—if they occur—are not expected until at least 2028.

The Environment Agency has gone further, demonstrating that Reading STW is already operating at or above its effective Dry Weather Flow-equivalent capacity, that the Local Plan's assessment significantly overstated available headroom, and that no further development should be connected to the works until upgrades are delivered.

Both organisations therefore point to the same conclusion: a Grampian-style condition is essential to prevent premature occupation, and key surface water drainage information remains outstanding.

We therefore request that Reading Borough Council:
1. Impose the full Thames Water condition preventing occupation until STW capacity is demonstrably secured and available.
2. Ensure the final foul drainage design matches the flows assessed in the pre-planning enquiry and does not exceed them.
3. Require full and detailed surface water drainage information prior to determination.

These steps are necessary to protect the overstretched wastewater infrastructure, avoid increased pollution risk to the already vulnerable Foudry Brook, and ensure that any development proceeds only when it is environmentally sustainable and responsibly supported by adequate utilities.

Wider Context
In addition to these technical and regulatory concerns, there is a wider environmental context that the Council must not overlook.

The EA has designated the Foudry Brook as a 'poor' ecological rating, a 'poor' phosphate rating, and a 'fail' chemical rating. There are two reasons given for this rating, one of which is "pollution from wastewater". The link to this Environment data is:
https://environment.data.gov.uk/catchment-planning/WaterBody/GB106039017380?cycle=2

During 2026 there has been 513 hours of pumping sewage into Foudry Brook i.e. over 21 days-worth of continuous sewage pumping in a 90-day period, i.e. more than 1 day of continuous sewage pumping in every 5 days.

Foudry Brook flows into the Kennet, which then flows along Waterloo Meadows, past the houses that are opposite Katesgrove Primary School, before going through Reading's premier shopping centre with 'riverside dining', past residential housing before entering the Thames next to Wokingham Waterside Centre 'where everyone, regardless of age or ability, can enjoy the benefits of being on the water.'

This disgusting situation has to stop and the situation cannot be allowed to be amplified by adding yet more dwellings to the network without a clear plan, a clear timetable, and funding to remedy this situation.