

**Land at former Hatfield Aerodrome, Hatfield  
Ref: APP/M1900/W/24/3346607**

## **PUBLIC INQUIRY**

**Interested Party Statement  
by Chris Berry BA(Hons), Dip TP, MRTPI**

**on behalf of:  
CPRE Hertfordshire – the countryside charity**

November 2024

## **INTRODUCTION**

1. My name is Chris Berry. I am a Member of the Royal Town Planning Institute, hold a Bachelor of Arts with Honours degree in Geography from the University of London and a post-graduate Diploma in Town and Country Planning from the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne.
2. I have practised in both the public and private sectors for over 45 years and been employed by a wide range of organisations including local government, development corporations, planning consultancies and development agencies. Latterly I have acted as interim Chief Planning Officer and Assistant Director for a number of London and Hertfordshire Boroughs and am presently employed as Planning Manager for CPRE Hertfordshire – the countryside charity.
3. I am presenting this statement for the Inquiry on behalf of CPRE Hertfordshire. CPRE Hertfordshire acts to protect countryside in Hertfordshire and is active in supporting local organisations and communities to protect open spaces and rural activity from inappropriate development and environmental degradation.
4. CPRE Hertfordshire supports fully both decisions of Hertfordshire County Council to refuse permission for the proposed development which is the subject of this Inquiry. We also support the considerable local community opposition and the continuing concerns of Colney Heath Parish Council and Hatfield Town Council since the original planning application in 2016.

## **Background to the appeal**

5. The subject of this inquiry is the application (Hertfordshire County Council application reference number PL/0232/21) for full planning permission for the development of a new quarry at the former Hatfield Aerodrome. This application was refused by Hertfordshire County Council on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2024 citing eight Reasons for Refusal. This followed a previous application made by Brett Aggregates Ltd in 2016 which was refused and the subject of a planning appeal by planning inquiry which was dismissed in January 2022 (APP/M1900/W/21/3278097).
6. Recently, on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2024, Hertfordshire County Council resolved that it will not now contest the appeal and has withdrawn its eight Reasons for Refusal and is not calling evidence on the main issues. Subsequently, the Rule 6 parties, comprising Colney Heath Parish Council, Hatfield Town Council, Ellenbrook Area Residents Association, and Smallford and Sleapshyde Residents Association have also rescinded their status at the inquiry, but not their opposition to the proposals.
7. Accordingly, proofs of evidence have been prepared by the Appellant only and representations are being made at the inquiry by the former Rule 6 parties. CPRE Hertfordshire is making this statement as an Interested Party to the inquiry, in full support of the issues raised by the former Rule 6 parties opposing the proposed development. The development plan for the area is the adopted Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan 2016 – 2036.

## **CPRE Hertfordshire position**

8. CPRE Hertfordshire notes that the area affected by the application is identified as a Preferred Area for mineral extraction in the Hertfordshire Minerals Local Plan Review 2002 - 2016 adopted in 2007. Notwithstanding this allocation there remain significant issues of concern relating to the Green Belt, landscape character, public access and biodiversity.
9. In noting that the Minister has recovered the appeal for her decision, CPRE Hertfordshire wishes to make representations regarding a range of planning issues and possible planning conditions and obligations, some of which relate to historical undertakings given and not implemented related to the provision of a country park. It is clear that there has been no significant progress on agreements relating to the future establishment and operation of the area known as Ellenbrook Fields which are of crucial importance to the neighbouring communities.

## **Green Belt**

10. The land identified for this proposed development is designated as London Metropolitan Green Belt in the adopted Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan and we recognise that the area of the planning application forms part of Preferred Area A designated in the Hertfordshire Minerals Local Plan Review as noted above and subsequently included in the emerging Hertfordshire Minerals Local Plan presently in preparation.
11. The use of Green Belt for minerals extraction is addressed in paragraph 155 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) where such activity is seen as “not inappropriate provided they preserve its (Green Belt) openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.” If the present application is permitted, it will be necessary to ensure that the openness of the Green Belt through remediation following mineral extraction is maintained and this requirement should form part of robust legal obligations attached to any permission granted.
12. The danger to the Green Belt is greatly exacerbated by the recent consents granted for residential development nearby at Bullens Green Lane, Colney Heath Lane and Boissy Close which is leading to huge losses of open countryside in southern Hertfordshire. Future proposed allocations in the St Albans Local Plan will further erode the amount of protected land which is so highly valued by local communities.

## **Landscape character**

13. Following the development of the Hatfield Business Park approximately 400 acres was provided for the formation of a country park known as Ellenbrook Fields Country Park which opened to the public in 2010. Since then the country park has become a much valued and well used local facility, providing for recreation and access to wildlife and open space to local communities and visitors.
14. Ellenbrook Fields Country Park was developed by Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council and St Albans City and District Council and specifically and proactively promoted and managed as a country park and wildlife site, with open public access, for more than two decades. It contains maintained paths and many professionally prepared information boards to enhance the recreational visitor experience, including information about the site history,

and how regeneration of the various flora and fauna of the park has occurred over the past two decades.

### **Public access**

15. The significance of the rural landscape is enhanced by its location and accessibility between the highly urbanised settlements of Hatfield and St Albans and the villages of Smallford and Colney Heath. The Country Park has become a significant local asset and facility for local people and visitors providing opportunities for walking (including regularly scheduled Hertfordshire County Council (HCC)-sponsored 'Hertfordshire Health Walks'), running, bird-watching, photography and other pursuits.

### **Biodiversity**

16. Particular concern relates to the substantial biodiversity which has developed within Ellenbrook Fields Country Park since its foundation over twenty years ago. We support fully the Statement submitted by Councillor Paul Zukowskyj to the inquiry as a comprehensive assessment of the present significance and value of the Country Park and the inadequacy of measures proposed to maintain and indeed enhance biodiversity as required by national and local planning policy.
17. Notwithstanding that the application was made prior to the mandatory requirements for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), it is clear that there is significant loss of BNG proposed by the mineral extraction works, and inadequate provision for remediation. Specifically, Policy ML9 of the adopted Hertfordshire Minerals Local Plan Review requires that “Where appropriate, the minerals planning authority will seek long-term overall enhancement to local biodiversity through restoration or by other means such as by the attachment of conditions or planning obligations.”
18. Further, in the emerging Hertfordshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan, Policy 15 requires that the impact of minerals development on biodiversity be minimised and a measurable gain in biodiversity demonstrated. This is supported by the adopted Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan where recommended main modifications to Policy SADM 16 reinforced the requirements for BNG for all developments of 10% or more.
19. In our view the requirements of paragraphs 185a and b and 186a of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) are not being met with regard to “protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity” which extend well beyond the requirements of section 41 of the NERC Act. There appears to be no provision, for example, for compensatory habitat to be established on adjoining or nearby land for the duration of the operations which will need to be at least 30 years, or longer to allow habitats to be restored to their former states.
20. CPRE Hertfordshire, together with Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust and other conservation bodies, are also aware of the growing significance of Local Natural Recovery Strategies. Full account should be taken of the requirements for more sustainable management of the countryside, particularly with regard to the potential remediation of temporary uses and activities, as in this case.

### **Opportunity for best practice**

21. Being aware of the growing legislative context regarding environmental enhancement following development, and if permission is granted, CPRE Hertfordshire regards this proposed development as offering the opportunity for an exemplary demonstration of best practice in remediation and the minimisation of disturbance during minerals extraction. We would urge immediate consideration of joint action by the Appellant together with Hertfordshire County Council, Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council and St Albans City and District Council to reduce the impacts of minerals extraction on the Ellenbrook Fields Country Park.
22. As Councillor Zukowskyj notes in his Statement, such action should include a restoration and aftercare plan as a material component of the planning application and the absence of such a plan suggests that the present application is not compliant with national planning policy. The circumstances of this application, and the history of the establishment of the Ellenbrook Fields Country Park should require a specific solution which both reflects the highly valued nature of this open countryside between urban settlements and planning policy regarding minerals extraction and environmental enhancement.
23. In the specific circumstances and history of this and the previous application, we would request the Inspector, if permission is to be granted, to direct the relevant parties to investigate further how to reduce the detrimental impacts of potential minerals extraction in this location.

CPRE Hertfordshire – the countryside charity  
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