Opening Statement by the Third Party Group to the Proposed Quarry Development at Former Hatfield Aerodrome

We gather here as residents and community stakeholders, united in our deep concerns over the proposed quarry development at the former Hatfield Aerodrome. This proposal represents a significant threat to the character, safety, and environmental integrity of our local area—a place we call home and are committed to protecting for future generations. Despite claims of economic need, we must carefully weigh these against the lasting costs to our community, environment, and cherished Green Belt lands, as stipulated by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and other critical local policies.

1. **Green Belt Preservation**

The Hatfield Aerodrome site is part of our precious Green Belt, a protective boundary that safeguards our countryside from urban sprawl, ensuring a lasting natural separation between towns and cities. The NPPF is explicit in stating that mineral extraction within Green Belt areas is only permissible if it preserves the openness of the land and does not conflict with Green Belt purposes. Given the scale and nature of the proposed quarry, this development will irreversibly alter the landscape, violating the fundamental principle of openness and resulting in lasting encroachment. If approved, this proposal will set a dangerous precedent, effectively eroding the Green Belt protections that are so crucial to our community's identity and environmental sustainability.

2. **Environmental Impact and Biodiversity**

This quarry proposal will disrupt the fragile ecosystems that have formed over decades. The importance of enhancing the natural environment must not be overlooked, and this development contradicts this directive in the NPPF by fragmenting habitats and diminishing biodiversity. While a restoration plan is proposed, it lacks the comprehensive safeguards needed to truly protect and restore the ecological balance in the area. Long-term disruptions to local wildlife habitats are certain, placing irreplaceable flora and fauna at risk.

3. **Public Access and Local Amenity**

The former Hatfield Aerodrome has become a valued public space for residents—a place for families, walkers, and nature enthusiasts in an area which is deficient in natural open space and the few alternatives are difficult to access. It is integral to our community's well-being. However, the quarry's operational footprint will severely restrict access, undermining the NPPF's objective to preserve and enhance public rights of way and open access. For years to come, residents will be denied full enjoyment of a cherished communal space, trading peace and recreation for noise and disruption.

We also have considerable concerns about the duration of the quarry including its restoration, this will in turn impact on many other issues including noise, dust, traffic, local heritage and public access to the Country Park.

4. Traffic and Highway Safety:

The proposed increase in heavy vehicle traffic on the A1057 is a serious concern. Developments should only proceed if they do not compromise highway safety or cause severe congestion. The anticipated surge in HGV movements along a road that is already strained by traffic will significantly heighten accident risks, posing a direct threat to the safety of local residents, cyclists, and schoolchildren who regularly use this route.

5. Water Resources and Groundwater Protection

The proximity of this development to a critical bromate plume raises grave concerns about the risks of groundwater contamination. Uncertainties remain over whether proposed measures will sufficiently protect our groundwater. Once bromate has entered our water source then it is too late, the bromate will potentially take hundreds of years to eradicate. We believe that the authorities should adopt a zero risk strategy toward quarrying on this land and that no quarrying should be allowed in the area until the plume is completely eradicated. An incident here could have long-term consequences for the local water supply, affecting households and the local ecosystem alike.

Flooding is also a major concern for residents.

The area of Ellenbrook and Smallford have both recently been subject to severe weather conditions when Ellenbrook Lane and Oaklands Lane were flooded, and the Ellen Brook came very close to overflowing.

The loss of a large amount of semi-permeable land will increase surface water flooding putting the area at risk of flooding particularly as the residential areas of Ellenbrook and Smallford are lower than the quarry site with water running downhill.

The impact of climate change means that flooding is no longer a rare event but one that is increasingly occurring.

The above issues highlight the fact that the area is already at risk and any additional water flow from quarrying at Ellenbrook Fields could potentially have a major impact on the local area including access to Ellenbrook Country Park.

6. Noise

The appellant's selection of receptor sites is not sufficient to provide a representative measure of background noise and in consequence the impact of the increase in noise due to the proposed development is underestimated.

The readings from Noise Assessment 10 do not represent the properties to the South of the application site, nor Popefield Farm. They have all been taken on the busy A1057 and therefore the baselines are higher than they should be.

There are no specific noise readings for Lawrence Close, despite it being the closest residential area to the quarry operation and subject to noise for the entire duration of the quarry.

We believe that the noise levels are such that the Country Park will not be fit for purpose and therefore you cannot integrate a Quarry and a Park together.

7. Heritage

Despite the changes made to the plans following the Inquiry, the new planning application being considered does not adequately consider the setting of and impact on Popefield Farmhouse. Popefield Farm and its barns were originally for agricultural purposes so the buildings relationship with the surrounding landscape are an important part of the history of these buildings.

In addition to this, the issue raised by the previous Inspector, concerning the extended period of quarrying across four phases around Popefield Farm and the enduring effect on the residents of Popefield Farm, has not been addressed at all.

Other listed buildings / assets within close proximity to the quarry have not been considered as part of the application, and there has been no impact assessment undertaken for these listed assets.

8. Air Quality

Residents of St Albans and Hatfield are concerned about the impact of the proposed quarry operations and associated infill works on the air quality of the surrounding area, particularly the consequences for those living in neighbouring properties.

The case made by the appellants is far from sufficient to provide appropriate assurance about the possible risks to public health resulting from the air pollutants that will be released by the proposed works. We contend that the planning application is insufficient with respect to addressing air quality concerns and that the appeal should be dismissed to protect the health and well-being of local residents and the local amenity. The inadequacy of the air quality assessment means that it cannot be demonstrated that planning conditions can adequately mitigate the possible risks to health and local amenity.

We also contend that the evidence presented in the ES and HIA does not demonstrate that the proposed scheme is compatible with the requirement for HCC and other local authorities to meet the legislated government air quality targets implemented in December 2022 as well as local authority pledges concerning air quality.

9. Inadequate Justification of Need

The appellant claims that the quarry is necessary to meet the regional demand for sand and gravel. However, again planning policy requires that mineral needs be balanced with other planning considerations. In this case, the projected output of this quarry is relatively minor, whilst the toll on the environment and the community is substantial. The proposed extraction simply does not warrant the harm it will inflict on our local resources, environment, and quality of life.

10. Inconsistency with Local and National Planning Policy:

This proposal stands in conflict with both the Hertfordshire Minerals Local Plan Policy 3, and the terms of the 2000 Section 106 Agreement concerning the Hatfield Aerodrome. That agreement stipulated that any mineral extraction should meet stringent conditions to preserve public access and environmental quality - conditions this proposal fails to satisfy. By proceeding with this development, we risk undermining the trust between developers, local authorities, and the community, weakening the very principles of fair, balanced, and sustainable planning.

11. Conclusion

In light of the profound and adverse impacts this quarry would have on our Green Belt, local environment, public amenity, highway safety, air quality and water resources, we strongly urge that this development be rejected. The proposal stands in direct conflict with the NPPF, the Hertfordshire Minerals Plan, and other fundamental policies that aim to protect our natural and community assets from unsustainable development. Our opposition is rooted not only in planning policy but in a sincere desire to preserve the quality of life, natural beauty, and safety of this area for generations to come.

Thank you for your attention and consideration of these critical issues.