

APPEAL AGAINST REFUSAL OF PLANNING APPLICATION FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A NEW QUARRY ON LAND AT THE FORMER HATFIELD AERODROME

APPLICATION REFERENCE: PL/0232/21

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APPELLANT: Brett Aggregates Limited

ADDRESS OR LOCATION AND THE NATURE OF THE PROPOSED

DEVELOPMENT: Land at Hatfield Aerodrome, Off Hatfield Road, Hatfield, Hertfordshire also known as Ellenbrook Fields/ Country Park)

Good afternoon, Inspector.

My name is Vanessa Meader, and my husband and I have lived in Ellenbrook for over 20 years. For most of that time, Ellenbrook Fields has been a constant presence in our lives, giving us access to a safe and peaceful, wildlife rich, open *country park*. It is not necessarily a destination that we plan ahead to visit, but located practically on our doorstep, we have grown to view it as a valuable resource, a local destination that is quietly essential - it is simply there when it is needed and has been a joyous place for us (and many other locals) to visit on a daily basis over the last 15 years.

This inquiry has been reopened to consider several points. These points include the fact that Brett's 2023 planning proposal did not strike a fair balance in protecting the amenity of residents and users of the park whilst carrying out quarrying. The proposed Public Access Strategy also failed to achieve convenient cross-park, east to west access during the lifetime of the proposed quarry.

It is precisely public amenity and access - real, lived, everyday access - that I am here to speak about today.

Ellenbrook Fields is not simply somewhere people go for exercise or leisure when they have spare time. It offers more - great peace, calm and safe open access to nature and healthy green space. It is a place to unwind when life feels heavy, when the mental load of everyday life needs to be lifted and dissipated.

Having endured many years of my father's progressive dementia and his very recent departure from our lives, I am acutely aware of just how beneficial this open and peaceful green space is for clearing my mind and improving my wellbeing.

This type of beneficial public amenity only works when a space has open access, is unbridled, preferably nearby, and free - free of charge, free of physical barriers, and free of instruction. As things currently stand, you can step into the fields, freely choosing the routes that you wish to undertake. You can walk several miles of either easy or rough terrain, in any direction or rotation through the park that you wish, breathing in clean, dust free air. You can let your thoughts settle, watch the wildlife and listen to the birds without being interrupted by the sounds of HGV's, or busy plant workings. You can watch the mature landscape change with the seasons, rather than walking alongside tiny whips, quarry mud tracks and plant workings. And you can return home feeling steadier and that little bit more resilient than when you left, rather than feeling deprived of what was once a much valued and beautiful open green space.

This is not incidental use; it is fundamental use.

There is now widespread recognition - including within our health services - that regular access to natural green space plays a critical role in supporting our physical and mental wellbeing, reducing anxiety, easing depression, and helping people cope with the pressures of everyday life. Ellenbrook Fields already performs this function quietly and effectively, without formality and without cost to the public purse.

What is being proposed fundamentally threatens that role.

It is hugely disappointing to see that the newly proposed Public Access plans put forward by Brett this February 2026, offer nothing significantly new or improved to residents and park users in the layout and progression of the proposed quarry site.

Fundamentally the design of the quarry and public access to the park has not changed in any significant or meaningful way and it is hugely restrictive and detrimental to the amenity and access of a large and important section of the country park.

We are told that access will remain. But access is not binary. It is not simply a question of whether lines exist on a map. It is about whether people still feel able to use a place *spontaneously, frequently, and without psychological resistance*.

When access becomes constrained, segmented, diverted, or temporary - when it begins to feel managed rather than welcoming - people do not respond by adapting neatly. They tend to withdraw.

Short walks become no walks. A quiet 10-minute break from work outside becomes screen time indoors. The small, consistent habits that help people remain physically and mentally well are the first to disappear.

The National Planning Policy Framework recognises this.

Paragraph 96 makes clear that planning decisions should create places that are **healthy, inclusive and safe**, that **promote social interaction**, and that are **safe and accessible so that fear and exclusion do not undermine quality of life or community cohesion**.

Paragraph 98 further guards against the unnecessary loss of valued facilities where this would reduce a community's ability to meet its day-to-day needs.

Ellenbrook Fields is precisely such a facility - not because of designation, but because of how it is used.

The current value of this place lies in its *ease and open access* for the thousands of people that live in its locality. We do not need to

get into a car to get to it. We do not need to pay to get into it. For many years we have not needed to follow a prescribed route. You are not aware of being directed, diverted, or monitored. That sense of autonomy is deeply connected to wellbeing, dignity, and inclusion.

The proposed changes replace openness with structure, and freedom with compliance. Movement becomes something you do *around* activity, rather than *within* the landscape. That may meet a technical definition of access, but it does not meet the human one.

For many residents - particularly those juggling work; with caring responsibilities; or dealing with mental health and/or physical impairment challenges - access that requires extra effort, navigation, or tolerance of disruption very quickly becomes no access at all. When the threshold to entry rises even slightly, those who most rely on the space are the first to lose it.

The impact will not be dramatic or headline-grabbing. It will instead be cumulative and quiet and hugely detrimental. Fewer people coming out in the evenings. Fewer solitary walks taken to decompress. Fewer unplanned encounters that remind people they are part of a wider community.

What Ellenbrook Fields currently offers is not just space, but relief — relief from pressure, from noise, from isolation.

Once that function is fractured, it cannot simply be restored later. Mental health does not pause during long, phased projects. People need these spaces now, consistently, and without caveat.

In this context, public access is not a technical matter. It is a human one. It is about whether people retain the ability to care for their own wellbeing in small, ordinary, deeply personal ways.

I ask that you consider not only where people will technically be allowed to walk, but how often they will choose to do so — and how it will feel when they try.

Ellenbrook Fields matters because it is woven into people's lives, not set apart from them. And once that thread is broken, it cannot simply be tied back together again.

If public access no longer supports everyday use, mental wellbeing, and social connection, then it is access in name only. And that, Inspector, is not what national planning policy requires — nor what this community can afford to lose.

Thank you for listening.

Vanessa Adorni Meader

