

Statement by: Cllr Rose Grewal, Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council, Ward Councillor for Hatfield Villages

Submitted to the Appeal reference APP/M1900/W/24/3346607, Land at former Hatfield Aerodrome

20TH November 2024

1. Introduction

I am the Welwyn Hatfield Borough ward Councillor for Hatfield Villages. Ellenbrook Park sits in my ward, bordering the neighbourhoods of Salisbury Village and Ellenbrook and the University of Hertfordshire DeHavilland Campus and sports fields.

2. Strategic Vision for Hatfield

The last-minute decision by Hertfordshire County Council to withdraw its opposition to the quarry on Ellenbrook Park, has come as a blow to the residents of my ward and to the whole of Hatfield – our residents have been badly let down by their County representative who have failed to defend their interests. I urge the inquiry to ensure that the legitimate concerns of our residents are considered and given weight, as they are the ones who face the prospect of living with a quarry on their doorstep for decades to come.

The willingness of Hertfordshire County Council to accept a largescale quarry on a cherished, well used Country Park, adjacent to a densely populated residential area, highlights the limited and negative view of Hatfield, which persists at County level.

Designated a New Town in the post war era, Hatfield has a long and proud heritage of industry and innovation, playing a vital role in the history of aviation and the second world war. This dynamic, progressive tradition continues today with our universities emerging as centres of excellence in research and development and Hatfield Business Park, evolving as one of the County's major employment areas. We want to build on this latent energy, and establish Hatfield, with its wonderful sense of community, as a special place where people are proud to live and work and bring up their families. And Ellenbrook Park plays a vital role in this vision.

The sense of wildness, openness and scale of Ellenbrook Park, which is not found elsewhere in the area, offers residents an opportunity to escape the pressures of urban living. It is now widely understood that access to nature supports physical and mental health and wellbeing and Ellenbrook Park, which is free to access, is well used by walkers, ramblers, cyclists and birdwatchers. Defined as deficient in access to nature, Hatfield is the focus of further largescale housing growth, which will add to its urban density. In this context, Ellenbrook Park constitutes a highly valuable green lung, supporting quality of life and wellbeing and should be viewed as a fundamental part of the emerging vision of Hatfield.

Including Ellenbrook Park in the Mineral and Waste Local Plan and thereby allowing the loss of this valuable green space to a quarry, shows a gross lack of understanding of Hatfield today and how our town is evolving.

3. Nature Conservation and Biodiversity

Ellenbrook Park is not a blank slate. Left largely undisturbed for the past twenty years, it has emerged as a special place for nature with grasslands, woodlands, wetlands and hedgerows - habitats that can support a varied and rich wildlife. Managed appropriately, the wildlife on the site can become more biodiverse, offering a unique space for nature and people.

The State of Nature report, published last year by the State of Nature Partnership, identifies the alarming decline in habitats and species across the UK, highlighting the urgent need for measures that support nature recovery. Green spaces that are spatially linked to create strategic networks are considered the most valuable in this endeavour. The scale and unbroken extent of Ellenbrook Park is relatively rare in an urban setting – as a significant wildlife corridor the park is of strategic as well as local significance in terms of its potential to support policies for nature conservation and recovery.

The quarry operation will involve the stripping of the site and destruction of ecosystems that have taken decades to emerge. If the quarry is approved, restoration of these habitats and the species they support, will take many decades in the future to be reinstated. I believe that Ellenbrook Park should continue to evolve as a haven for wildlife and for people. However, should the quarry be approved, contrary to **our** vision for the site, measures need to be in place to ensure that remediation happens to a high standard and habitats are established which will achieve a biodiversity net gain. Remediation should be in keeping with the evolved landscape character of the rest of Ellenbrook Park.

4. Cumulative Impacts

Hatfield already contributes heavily to the supply of sand and gravel. Quarrying has been taking place here for many years and further quarries are planned to the north of Ellenbrook Park, on the North West Hatfield site. Given this context, the cumulative impact of the proposed quarry has not been fully recognised. I believe more should have been done by Hertfordshire County Council to explore other more suitable locations in the County, where there would be less direct impact on urban settlements and where there isn't the risk from underground contamination. Furthermore, there has not been sufficient emphasis placed within the existing or emerging Mineral and Waste Local Plan on recycling of materials to meet targets for the supply of sand and gravel.

5. Access and Amenity

If approved, the quarry will result in the loss of access to a substantial area of the park for many years to come – for some of us it will be a lifetime. Where access is proposed, the experience of the park will be impacted, with people having to navigate fencing, high bunds, stockpiles and operational activity.

It is the fundamental principle of the quarry on Ellenbrook Park that is the issue and this cannot be mitigated by the access strategy or the phasing plan or by removing the batching plant.

However, if the quarry is recommended for approval, conditions need to be sufficiently robust to facilitate maximum public access, pedestrian safety, ease of movement and quality of experience.

As well as the loss of the amenity of Ellenbrook Park itself, the proximity of the quarry to residential areas and sporting facilities, means people living, working and studying in my ward will experience more noise, deterioration in air quality and increased traffic from HGV movements, impacting their everyday quality of life.

If approval is granted, sufficiently strong measures need to be in place to mitigate these, impacts, including robust processes of monitoring, restrictions on the hours of operation and strict adherence to the timescale of the overall lifespan of the quarry. And should agreed thresholds be breached, work must cease immediately and not recommence until agreed solutions have been implemented.

6. Groundwater Contamination

The proposed quarry will be sited near the largest known bromate contamination of public and private groundwater supplies. Given the unpredictable nature of the contamination, residents are rightly worried about the extraction process in this high-risk area. The complex hydrological factors associated with the contamination means there is no guarantee that the bromate plume will not be disturbed, causing wider contamination and the unthinkable consequences this could have.

If this appeal is recommended for approval, residents want a robust set of measures in place that give confidence in the reliability, degree and manner of monitoring. Again, work should cease immediately if agreed safeguard thresholds are breached and work cease completely until agreed solutions are implemented.

Should things go wrong the remediation required is likely to be costly and extensive. Air tight assurances are needed to ensure that responsibility for this will not end up being borne by the tax payer.

7. Ellenbrook Park Trust

In respect of the Section 106 2000 agreement relating to the transfer of Ellenbrook Park and associated funds to the Ellenbrook Park Trust: This agreement was designed to place Ellenbrook Park in the public domain as an important community asset to mitigate the large-scale redevelopment of the former aerodrome site. The inspector will be aware that this agreement has not been honoured for over 20 years, leaving the future of Ellenbrook Park in a perpetual state of uncertainty.

The 2000 Agreement requires to be varied in order for permission to be granted. I understand that all parties are now working towards an agreed Deed of Variation. Although not an ideal scenario, as the 2000 Agreement should be implemented regardless, I strongly urge the completion of this process in a way which will afford the local community some much needed certainty in terms of the future of Ellenbrook Park and the timeframe for the long-awaited establishment of the Ellenbrook Park Trust and the transfer of agreed funds.

8. Conclusion

I conclude by asking the inquiry to hear the very legitimate concerns of our community about introducing quarry operations on this extremely sensitive and risk ridden location and for the inspector to recommend refusal of the appeal to the Secretary of State. This site

should never have been allocated by Hertfordshire County Council in their Minerals and Waste Local Plan and is an inappropriate location for a quarry.

Should the Inspector deem otherwise and recommend approval, I would urge that robust conditions are imposed to ensure the many and varied concerns and risks associated with the site are mitigated as far as possible. Either way, it is imperative that the 2000 S106 Agreement to establish the Ellenbrook Park Trust is finally implemented.