

Statement at Reconvened Planning Inquiry:

Gareth Aicken, nominee to prospective Country Park Trust

The key issue for this reconvened Planning Inquiry is Public Access. I'd like to make a few points about this in the context of the intended Ellenbrook Country Park and the Trust which is expected to manage it.

As I think all will know, the Park and the Trust were part of the Principal Agreement, the S106 document which was signed at the very end of the year 2000. And again, I think all will know that neither the Park nor its Trust have yet been established, though steps are I believe being undertaken to prepare for the formal setting up of the Trust in the light of the final decision on this Appeal. It is indeed unfortunate that the Country Park as a formal entity and the Trust that is to administer it have not yet been established. But the concerned local government authorities have nominated prospective members for the Trust: I am one of these, nominated by Hatfield Town Council. I cannot speak in the name of a Trust that does not yet exist, but I can put forward some views from the point of view of a prospective trustee. I believe they have a close bearing on the Appellant's revised Public Access Strategy.

In the Ministry's letter of 11 November 2025, the Planning Inspector was cited as having identified two failures in the Appellant's Public Access Strategy. First, it did not demonstrate that there would be "convenient cross-park access during the life of the quarry" as envisaged in the 2000 Principal Agreement. Second, its plans "to integrate the restored phases into the unaffected [that is, unquarried] part of the Ellenbrook Park in a timely manner" were lacking. The Appellant has now produced a revised Public Access Strategy that claims to incorporate "an incremental work process that maximises access across the park, at all times."

There are likely to be difficulties with the process of transferring small amounts of land incrementally to the Country Park Trust as and when the quarried land is restored – this could place a heavy burden including legal costs on the Trust. I understand that the Country Park Trust will not be required to accept transfers of land from within the quarried area as soon as they are restored.

If the Country Park Trust is not in a position to take over the quarried and restored land immediately, the Appellant is required to maintain it, including paths etc, until an eventual transfer to the Trust. In these circumstances the proposed conditions must require that the responsibility for ensuring convenient cross park access and integration with the unaffected eastern part of the Country Park rests with the Appellant - and that no obligations are placed on the Country Park Trust. During the period when the Appellant is managing this land, the conditions must also make clear that the Appellant must take responsibility for delivering the standards and access requirements contained in the Hatfield Aerodrome Supplementary Planning Guidance (CD3.3), specifically section 8 "Landscape Masterplan Framework and Strategy" and section 9 "Overall Green Belt and Minerals Strategy". This responsibility will not rest with the Country Park Trust. The framing of measurable and thus enforceable standards must be capable of ensuring convenient public access across the whole breadth of the Park throughout the quarrying period.