

Inspector.

Here I am again, this feels like Groundhog Day. I've lost count of the speeches, emails, letters, and reports, that I have written, read, trawled through, researched in the past 6 years that I have lived in Ellenbrook. I've attended Committees and Appeals, with two different babes in arms in tow over the years. It's only been 6 years but in that time Brett have been relentless, hammering local residents and local councils with applications and appeals. I've been pondering, particularly recently as I write yet another speech, how have we got here? Why are we still having to fight this when there have been so many reasonable, evidence based grounds as to why a quarry at this site is untenable? There have been numerous reasons put forward to the applicants as to why this is not a suitable site for the activities that they are proposing, this application and a remarkably similar iteration have both been rejected. What is it that keeps them coming back, over and over, faced with overwhelming consensus from all residents, all councils and all interested parties that Ellenbrook Fields is not the right site for them. Where else are they looking? Have they identified other possible sites? Perhaps that would be a better use of energy and funds? What is it about our fields that means they keep coming back? Hertfordshire County Council have now inexplicably done a complete U turn. Eight reasons, valid and solid reasons that the elected Committee members decided on, that this application was not to be granted, and almost a year later, without ongoing clarity, transparency or insights into what governance processes have been followed, we are now informed, without notice, that this position has completely changed.

My feelings around the way that all these applications and appeals have been handled and the bombshell dropped by HCC aside, I would like to give an insight into the enormous benefits that the fields have on local residents on a daily basis.

The residents of Hatfield live in a socio-economically diverse area. The percentage of households showing deprivation in at least one dimension stands at almost 50% according to the 2021 census. Despite the close proximity to the affluent area of St Albans, there isn't much in the town, that is for the public, that we can be proud of. Here we are at Hatfield House, a culturally rich site that sits in beautiful grounds of historic significance. The grounds that were once open to the public, and used by locals to walk, exercise and enjoy, has now become subject to a fee for entry, limiting access to those of mid to lower income families, of which Hatfield have a high proportion of. Where else can we see, in Hatfield, large open green space, free to be enjoyed by residents? Ellenbrook Fields is the last of those sites, already sliced up to build the business park, residences, a school on, and the rest promised to the community.

A report published by Public Health England titled 'Improving access to greenspace, a new review for 2020' is really clear in the benefits that access to open green spaces have on the mental health and physical wellbeing of populations. Extensive research has been done for this report, building on work already done in this sphere, and overwhelmingly results show that good quality greenspace has the potential to deliver substantial benefits for public health and wider local priorities at a relatively low cost, supporting the delivery of local health, social, environmental and economic priorities. Recent valuations in the report cite that £2.1bn per year could be saved in health costs if everyone in England had good access to greenspace. Access to greenspace – and I quote – “ can help to reduce exposure to air pollution, reduce the urban heat island effect, and mitigate excessive noise and reduce flood risk, all of which can

impair both physical and mental health.” The proposed activities are reducing access, not enhancing nor increasing. The proposed activities are noisy, not reducing excessive noise. The proposed activities would be negatively impacting on the air quality and potentially increasing risk of flooding, not helping reduce exposure to air pollution or reducing flood risk. These have all been identified as issues that have a detrimental impact on the physical and mental wellbeing of individuals. Should it not be a priority to protect the greenspace we have, enhancing and giving free access to residents, as promised, rather than limiting access, taking away established and well used routes and penning in walkers with direct, uninspiring routes. The Public Health England report is full of ideas for initiatives to enable and encourage individuals to take advantage of green space, gaining enormous benefits. How can we do that if it is stripped away? If it is not enough for local residents to be screaming this from the rooftops, perhaps you will give it weight coming from the experts!

Residential Amenity, or public access, has been a consideration throughout the Committee discussions, the appeal and through reasons for rejection of this application, but it hasn't seemed to hold much weight. For those of us living on the doorstep of another quarry however, this is a significant issue and one we do not feel has been mitigated effectively by the applicant.

The public access strategy that the applicants have popped together in a shiny leaflet does very little to quell any concerns I have about the rights of way and routes that would be available to the public. There isn't much substance, much 'strategy' that I can see here. A series of maps with some dotted lines are on page after page, but a chasm where details, important details, well thought out community engagement and benefits should be. Coming from Ellenbrook, where I live, and entering the site, it appears that on turning left, one would be forced to walk a long stretch to Popefield farm with bunds on one side, and an extremely busy road on the other before the landscape finally opens back up again. I'll be honest, that's not a thought that brings much joy to my heart, and is a long, pretty uninspiring stretch to get down in my fairly brief lunch break with the dog. The picture included on Page 5, men in hard hats and high vis, pointing across a ravaged landscape with an air of authority is unfortunately exactly what I expect our beautiful fields to turn into. An accurate visual aid I'd suggest. This access that the public are offered is no where near what is currently available and presents a real loss to anyone entering the Park from this side of the site. The opening paragraph from the public access strategy which states that "The Brett Group... has thrived based on a commitment to building long-term relationships with the communities in which they work" is a bit of a surprise I confess. So far, this relationship has felt far from collaborative and does not give me much hope for the future. I can't see how working this site in this way could be tenable whilst still offering residents the free access they so desperately need and use already. Anyway you carve the fields up, we lose.

As a family we use the fields multiple times a week, for dog walking as I have already spoken about, for exercise, for space for our two girls to run around safely. I have taught one child to ride her bike on the runway, and plan on teaching the other in the same place next year! I am a working parent, with very little time for myself, so I truly lean into those moments where I am surrounded by nature not distracted by a screen, small children or piles of washing, and I have time with my own brain with space to reflect and reset. This is the one place on my doorstep where there is access to wide open space, and perhaps most importantly in most areas there is a clear line of sight. For many of you sitting here this may feel like an odd thing to mention, but

unfortunately for a specific demographic in particular this will ring true. Open space, where you can see who is around, who is approaching is invaluable and sadly not in abundance. There is nowhere else locally, which is freely accessible, that has that benefit. It is one of the few places I feel safe, feel secure and can be fully aware of those around me. Being a woman, out alone in either rural or urban spaces, you are always, and I mean always, on high alert, watching for any potential threat coming your way. Ellenbrook Fields, and the open space it offers gives me the opportunity to go out into nature but keep space between me and anyone who feels like a threat. If you have a woman in your life, a partner, wife, sister, mother, a daughter, then I hope you understand the significance of this. Losing this safe, open space will have a significant impact and enormous loss on many, but specifically women. I do implore you to consider walking in our shoes, quite literally, and help provide us with a place where we can feel safe.

One of the reasons I am flabbergasted at this site being considered for quarrying is the proximity to not only a primary school... with children who attend, and play outside extensively ranging from babies to children of 11 years old, but also to a University Sports ground – which is not only utilised by students but also used regularly by local community groups. Even if considerations of the impact of air quality of residential properties on the doorstep of this quarry is not being considered, the primary school, full of kids developing, breathing in dust, the sports ground, full of kids and adults exercising, breathing in dust.... How is this not a major consideration and blocker already. My child attends this primary school, a school that was built as part of the Business Park development, that was then meant to protect the neighbouring fields as a Country Park. How can I keep her there and live with myself if this quarry goes ahead when I have read the research, and I know the risks of the dust to her lungs, the long term effects, the potential damage that it will cause. Being metaphorically patted on the head and told not to worry about it, it'll all be OK does absolutely nothing to put this fear aside and I would ask the applicants, if it was their children, their family, would they come to the same conclusion? Would they live next door to a quarry, would they send their children to this school, send their children to practice football on the University Sports Grounds, let them walk the dog around the site? If the answer to any of this is no, and I suspect if they were truly honest with themselves and us it would be, then why us? The proximity of this proposed quarry to established and existing communities and infrastructure should be enough to turn it down, let alone the litany of other reasons and evidence!

The risk of Bromate entering further water sources is not something that I would want to happen on my watch, to have my name anywhere near. The devastating impact that this will have by removing another precious water source from the supply, and the lack of successful mitigations undertaken on those already contaminated should be waving red flag to us all. Any work that poses even the slightest risk of further contamination should be steered clear of. We rely on water, it's a core necessity to our very existence. We don't know what the future will bring, and any risk to any water sources should be avoided like the plague. What a legacy to leave behind!

The Environment Act of 2021 was established to work towards cleaning up our country, a leading piece of legislation that reportedly aimed to set an example for the rest of the world to follow, to boost nature recovery to give us a chance to tackle biodiversity loss and climate change. Stripping away biodiversity to then fill in holes with rubbish and replant feels.... Weak

when you think about the aspirations this Act had. Labour have also recently pledged to expand nature rich habitats. Again, this feels completely at odds with what Brett are proposing here.

I could go on, I fear I have enough already, and on, and on with an endless list as to why this site is not right for this work. This is not NIMBYism, our backyard is already quarried, this is identifying real and concerning issues about the impact of the work that Brett are proposing and absolute devastation at the access that Brett are proposing to offer us. I am floored with HCC's revelation this week and genuinely cannot see how on earth we have got here. I can only hope that you can see through all the noise, see the facts, and see what the local residents of Hatfield would lose out on. The devastation to an exceptional piece of land, the very real impact on the physical and mental health of generations of Hatfield residents, and for what? For some potentially relatively low yields of gravel and sand. What a waste.

So, Inspector, I plead with you, to recommend that this appeal gets rejected, in line with the original committee decision, and put a stop to any further iterations of this application. This is exhausting, the constant battle to keep this land, keeping up with the moving goalposts from HCC. Why can't residents of Hatfield rely on the agencies that promise to work for local people to look out for our interests? The loss of this space would be devastating, and the impact of the quarry activities would be immeasurable. The applicants have proposed 32 years, at a minimum. In 32 years I've gone from starting primary school - the same age as my eldest child, through secondary school, graduated university, gone to Australia to travel and work, I've built a career, lost my father, I've found my husband, got married, had two children, bought and renovated our beloved family home. 32 years. The majority of my lifetime so far. Generations of Hatfield residents who lose out. What a length of time for them to class as 'Temporary'