

Statement at Planning Inquiry 19 November 2024 by Gareth Aicken
(delivered at the beginning of the afternoon session)

I'm Gareth Aicken. I am a Hatfield resident, a Hatfield Town Councillor, and the Council's nominee for the required Ellenbrook Country Park Trust. I am speaking in the last capacity. I will not go into a lot of detail but focus on one glaring fact – the failure to formally establish the Country Park, and the necessity for including it as a cast-iron condition for planning approval.

2. In 2000 a Section 106 Planning Obligation was signed by the Hertfordshire County Council, the St Albans City and District Council and the Welwyn Hatfield District (now Borough) Council; and by Arlington Property Developers who were then the owners of the land at Hatfield Aerodrome. This Agreement set out the conditions that would apply to any work on the site that might in future be approved. An important requirement was the establishment of a Country Park on part of the site, which would be managed by a Trust. Although extensive housing construction took place on part of the overall aerodrome site, and almost a quarter of a century has elapsed since the Agreement was signed, the Trust has yet to be set up and the Country Park yet to be formally established. How much longer will we have to wait?

3. The area of the Country Park has never been formally recognised and access to it depends on the permission of the landowners. But the area is crucial to the well-being of the people of Hatfield and to the communities on the St Albans side – Colney Heath, Smallford and Sleafshyde. Hatfield has less recreational park and open space for leisure which is free and accessible than current guidelines recommend for its population. To safeguard the Country Park and manage it effectively, it is essential that the process of setting up the Trust and formally establishing the Country Park is started now. And if planning permission for the quarry is to be granted, conditions and agreements must be put in place which cannot be ignored or watered down. These must ensure that the Country Park becomes a reality, and that the part of the Country Park affected by quarrying is restored by the Appellant when extraction is complete.

4. The 2000 Section 106 Agreement obviously needed updating and so a Deed of Variation has been proposed which – if planning permission were to be granted - would set out the conditions which would regulate the quarrying including arrangements for the Country Park. Hatfield Town Council and the other concerned parish-level council, Colney Heath, would (as in 2000) not be signatories. But, as their intended representation on the Country Park Trust

indicates, they are closely concerned with the substance of the negotiations and the conditions that may be agreed. However, consultation has been woefully inadequate.

5. Hatfield Town Council heard only at the Case Management Conference on 18 September that the County Council was not going to contest the Appeal by the Appellant. In the communications following this Conference, the Planning Inspector made clear that he wanted the views of third parties to be taken into account. I participated a Zoom call with representatives of the various councils on 16 October. But since then, and in spite of assurances from the County Council that an agreed draft would be shared when ready, Hatfield Town Council has not yet seen any draft of the proposed granting conditions or update of the proposed Deed of Variation.

6. Whatever the reason – and the time allowed by the County Council for a complex process has been very short – we have not been able to comment on whether the proposed Deed of Variation will be adequate to safeguard the interests of our residents and to ensure the establishment of the Country Park. We have also not seen any Statement of Common Ground between the County Council and the Appellant which would indicate the overall progress of negotiations.

7. In conclusion, I have found this a highly frustrating experience. To summarise position:

- After 24 years the Ellenbrook Country Park has still not been established.
- There has not been sufficient engagement have not had sufficient engagement in the present discussions and processes, or even enough information.
- Binding and enforceable commitments to set up the Country Park Trust and formally establish the Park itself must be agreed once and for all – with no fudging, no prevarication and no backsliding.
- And this must be agreed before any planning permission for the quarry is recommended to the Secretary of State.

8. The Country Park must become a reality. After waiting for so long, the people of Hatfield deserve no less.

Thank you.

Brenda Taplin

Subject: RE: Hatfield Aerodrome - Inquiry Programme

From: Gareth Aicken <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Wednesday, November 27, 2024 8:17 AM
To: Joanna Vincent <Joanna.Vincent@gateleyhamer.com>
Cc: Jonah Anthony <[REDACTED]>
Subject: Hatfield Aerodrome - Inquiry Programme [GATELEY-GHAM.FID139926]

Dear Joanna

My apologies: I am not able to attend the Inquiry meeting this afternoon. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED].

The meeting today is scheduled to discuss the Deed of Variation. However, the Inspector should be aware - though I am sure others will tell him - that the draft DoV has still not been circulated: it has not reached Hatfield Town Council. I recall the Inspector requesting on the opening day of the Inquiry that this should be circulated as soon as possible to relevant parties. There have been assurances from Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council that it was progressing, most recently on Monday, and expressing the hope that it would be ready very soon, but so far nothing. And WHBC claim it has "altered significantly" from the original draft.

The draft Planning Conditions were circulated by the County Council on Sunday, though one matter on which agreement had not been reached was the important matter of formally establishing the Country Park (and setting up the Trust) – a still unfulfilled condition of the 2000 Agreement. This was the subject of my brief statement on the opening day.

Overall, it is disappointing that third parties have not been kept informed or consulted by the county and district-level councils to the extent desirable, or indeed expected.

With kind regards,

Gareth Aicken
Hatfield Town Councillor
(and HTC nominee for the Ellenbrook Country Park Trust)



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