

**Statement to be given by Vanessa (Adorni) Meader at PUBLIC INQUIRY
Starting 19 November 2024**

APPEAL REF: APP/M1900/W/24/3346607 by Brett Aggregates Ltd

Good afternoon,

My name is Vanessa Meader, and I have lived in Ellenbrook for almost 20 years.

As long-term residents of Ellenbrook, my husband and I, along with our beautiful rescue dogs, have cherished this community and the natural green space its precious surroundings have offered us. As a trained horticultural professional (an RHS award-winning Garden Designer) and having designed therapeutic gardens built for the Horticultural Therapeutic charity Thrive in 2009, I work with plants and people daily. I understand and appreciate the true value of connecting with nature and the importance of free access to unspoilt green spaces, for our health, our sense of community and our essential biodiversity. This cannot be understated.

We have had access to Ellenbrook Fields since 2011. We are now on the brink of this country park being taken away from us indefinitely and replaced with something so detrimental to our community.

The alternative "local" sites of open green space include the great estate of Hatfield House, which occupies a large area of Hatfield's countryside, but incurs a considerable cost to visit on a regular basis and has restricted access, many local residents cannot afford the cost of a season ticket. Another, such green space is Stanborough Lakes, in Welwyn Garden City, but this involves a car or bus journey for Hatfield residents plus payment for car parking, to visit what is already a busy local park...

This further emphasises the importance of FREE accessibility to the entirety of Ellenbrook Fields, not just some dusty, noisy, polluted temporary walkways. It is invaluable asset to local residents; I cannot emphasise this enough.

Today, I want to make one thing clear: allowing this quarry to go ahead, carving up and destroying this existing sanctuary, would devastate Ellenbrook Fields and negatively impact the lives of thousands of residents who surround it, and hundreds of residents and visitors who rely on it daily. This is not an appropriate site.

This isn't just a patch of Green Belt, or an inter town division. It's a lifeline.

On a social and community level, Ellenbrook Fields is a space where friends are made. My husband and I have met and made numerous long-term friends since the area was opened up in 2011, friends that we would otherwise have never met. It offers an area to interact with unknown neighbours, in a positive and relaxed environment. Families walk there together. Dogs run free. Dog owners get much needed exercise and human interaction if they so wish. Children play and learn to cycle on the historic airfield, whilst watching the grazing cattle. Wildlife thrives as it is left to its own devices. For many, this is their only access to nature. Many people in the locality have either small gardens, or no garden at all... Where is the sense in removing this for absolutely no gain to the community, in fact it will deliver quite the opposite?

Research consistently shows that green spaces improve health, reduce stress, and combat mental health illnesses such as depression and anxiety. GPs now prescribe time in nature for precisely these reasons.

Green spaces, like Ellenbrook Fields, are not luxuries—they are essential to our physical and mental wellbeing.

This plan proposes to strip it away, for what will be approaching half a century!

Beyond Ellenbrook Fields' social importance, lies its incredible ecology.

This entire site is home to a wide variety of animal species, from roe and muntjac deer, to barn owls, kestrels and red kites, as well as flocks of crows, starlings and parakeets, skylarks, yellow hammers, visiting house martins, resident sparrows, tits, robins and water fowl, the list goes on! All this wildlife is situated in the entirety of Ellenbrook Fields, not just one corner. It is where they live, hunt, roost, nest and burrow...

I cannot quantify the number of hours that my husband and I have spent in the fields; evenings at dusk, as well as visits during the day, we've even enjoyed moonlit walks along the taxiway at night! After a hard day at work, absorbing the tranquillity and de-stressing whilst watching the numerous bird species gathering and chattering together as they prepare to roost is just magnificent. It is so therapeutic to watch the rabbits and foxes, alongside the amazing barn owls as they start to hunt and feed for the evening. We are not alone in this pastime, it is the same for so many neighbouring friends and local residents, and we trust that you will bear this usage of the park in

mind whilst on your tour of the site. Obviously, this tour has had to be scheduled in the middle of a working day, so please bear in mind that it is by no means a true reflection of the park's full usage.

The fields hum with bees and butterflies, and other pollinators that are attracted by the native and diverse plant and tree life that supports them and us. Often the wildflowers in the fields by the gravel mound near Nottcutts, can be seen covered in black and yellow caterpillars, something you would never see in residential gardens. These pollinator species are not only integral to this ecosystem, but also vital to the environmental balance of the wider neighbouring region.

Ellenbrook Fields offers a thriving natural habitat that cannot be immediately recreated elsewhere and quarrying in this area will very obviously present an immediate ecological loss which we have no guarantee will be re-established even in the long term. Who will be monitoring the progress of this site in ecological terms? How will Biodiversity Net Gain be quantified and checked upon once the heart of our sanctuary has been ripped apart? Where will we walk to see such an abundance of wildlife? Will it be down a narrow bund enclosed path; lined with tiny whip plants; with passing HGV vehicles in close proximity to us? If this wasn't such a fundamentally sad prospect, we'd all be thinking that this alternative offering to our currently beautiful park was actually a joke!

The Environment Act 2021 makes biodiversity net gain a mandatory requirement for developments.

For years (through my work), I have witnessed how often plans for ecologically friendly planting schemes for new developments are submitted and approved by council planners as part of the applicant's conditions. Implementation of these schemes are then often ignored by the developer, the planting actioned is not necessarily what has been specified. If there is little budget put aside by the developer to care and maintain the schemes, most of the planting dies. Site Management reports of 25+ years are often submitted as part of the conditions, alongside the soft landscape schemes. But councils do not have the resources to regularly check that schemes are adequately planted out and maintained.

All too often new planting fails, I have seen this on countless occasions. There is much information regarding the failures of quarry operators to deliver what has been set out and agreed upon as part of the original conditions. The failures sadly far outnumber the successes and I am not sure that Brett can currently quote on many transformative successes.

So, when we are told, don't worry your site will improve for the better, perhaps we are right to feel enraged at the deception of this statement. Many of us will sadly be dead within the next couple of decades - it is likely possible that this will be sped up by the increased silica dust, traffic pollution, noise and congestion stress right on our doorsteps. Combine this with the devastating removal of our country park and what you will gain is a depressed and sickening community.

So, it really is detrimental and impactful to the local community in every way, it will deprive us of an invaluable asset. Brett's own ecological expert has stated in his Biodiversity report that, Biodiversity Net Gain is very much a long-term prospect.

The applicant has cited that there will be a 10% net gain, but it appears that the proposal to achieve this prediction includes no mechanisms for either monitoring it effectively or enforcing action if failure to achieve this goal is looking unlikely? Effectively what we are looking at is self-regulation, which historically cannot be relied upon in any industry.

Realistically any proper gain will not be apparent until the end of the quarry, and that's only if it is handled correctly – a big if. There is absolutely no net gain in the short term, it doesn't matter how anyone wishes to frame it, there will be a very distinct deficit for many years to come alongside drastically reduced public amenity.

It is a clear and recognised fact that quarrying is inherently destructive. The notion that we can simply "replace" a site like this with a maze of compacted bunds and narrow walkways next to the main road, fails to recognise how the fields are currently used by the people and the complexities of the existing eco systems.

So, I repeat once again, this is not an appropriate site in which to quarry when there are other more viable and less impactful quarrying options available in Hertfordshire. We are talking about inflicting a hugely detrimental long-term event (40+ years) on thousands of local residents in close proximity to the site, how is this right?

In the immediate term, what can we look forward to if the quarry is permitted?

As previously stated, the complete destruction of habitat; hedgerow, woodland, and open meadow. As with us visiting humans, nature will be displaced, leading to the collapse of their local populations.

The impact would be sudden, drastic and devastating for many.

We can look forward to increased air pollution, noise, and traffic directly on our doorsteps. It will make daily life close to unbearable for so many, especially for those who have known the beauty of the park and previously had the privilege of living on its doorstep, but now have the misfortune of living on top of a quarry!

It will bring more than an additional 200+ HGV movements daily. We are already surrounded by vehicular pollution from the heavily used A1, A14, A1000 and A1057 which surround Ellenbrook. There are already hundreds of trucks using the often gridlocked A1057 for the Cemex Quarry, various business parks and nurseries. There are also a huge number of large buses frequenting Ellenbrook in connection with the university. The increased diesel pollution with the addition of hundreds more HGVs does not bear thinking about, how on earth does this not affect our air quality that is no doubt already high in pollutants? This increased congestion of HGVs is unsustainable and potentially dangerous, there have already been several significant accidents involving HGVs and buses on the A1057 just in the last couple of years.

Worse still, silica dust from the quarry, a known carcinogen, would blow into our homes, schools, and playgrounds. This would expose adults and children to health risks every day. Those with existing health conditions, such as asthma and COPD, will immediately become more vulnerable and more prone to life-threatening health events.

Around other quarry sites in the UK the dust coating can be seen on every inch of the immediate landscape.

No mitigation measures can fully control airborne dust from quarries. It is inescapable. It is currently recognised (although not yet written in law), that quarries should be sited at a minimum distance of 1000 metres from residential areas such as ours. There are reams of news articles citing the disastrous health effects of quarrying in residential locations. Research in Canada and the USA show that the silica dust can travel many kilometres and is directly responsible for the inflammatory lung disease silicosis. So, just like asbestos, lead water pipes, paraquat, DDT, PCB's and CFC's – to name but a few previously legal but now well recognised toxic materials – do we have to wait for thousands of people to die a painful and miserable death before common sense prevails?

Let's be ahead of the curve. Having a quarry sited so close to an existing community does not make sense, once again this is NOT an appropriate

location on which to site a quarry when there are other more appropriate options available in Hertfordshire.

So, what is the medium to long-term picture?

Studies show that medium-term, most mitigation efforts fail to recreate the rich, functioning ecosystems that they aim to replace. Often invasive species move in and outcompete the species that bring ecological richness.

Young trees, or whips, rarely thrive and mature on bunds, and by the time they might, the quarry cycle will have moved on and the plantings are ripped back out. "Restoration" promises of planting trees, creating bunds, and restoring biodiversity will undoubtedly fall short in the medium-term.

Studies show that in the long-term of 40+ years, habitats created as part of mitigation rarely achieve the ecological richness of those they replaced. Soil degradation, altered hydrology, and changes to local flora and fauna often results in permanent damage to the ecosystem.

In reality, such schemes are all too often little more than greenwashing.

And what about the water?

This area lies over Europe's largest bromate contamination plume - a toxic legacy that already endangers our water supply. Quarrying could disturb this plume at any time, spreading contaminants into local and even London drinking water.

Brett's plan could lead to irreversible pollution, jeopardising water security for generations.

This site raises significant concerns under the Environment Act. ***The national planning policies are clear: environmental risks like these must take precedence in planning decisions.***

Once this damage is done, it cannot be undone. Fresh water is a precious resource that should not be gambled with – who wants to have that as their legacy? Are we really prepared to gamble with the health of tens of thousands of people for the sake of a bit of gravel that can be quarried elsewhere?

So, what's the realistic plan?

Please avoid the unnecessary destruction of our country park!

The National Planning Policy Framework is very clear that developments affecting irreplaceable habitats should be refused unless there are “wholly exceptional reasons.”

Is a gravel quarry in this site a “wholly exceptional reason” when there are other far less risky and less impactful options available?

I think that we all know that the answer to this is a resounding **NO**.

Let's not forget the broken promises that led us here. When the de Havilland site closed, residents were promised a formal nature reserve. That promise remains unfulfilled since the year 2000.

I would just like to end by saying how betrayed we in the locality feel, by HCC's submission to Brett Aggregates Ltd. HCC were supposed to uphold and argue for the very valid principles that led to the original clear refusal of this planning application but have clearly failed us in this instance.

Breaking the community's trust is one thing. Are the authorities and public decision-makers now prepared to go one step further by sacrificing the health, wellbeing, and future of whole communities for short-term corporate gain?

As previously said, Brett will profit, and when the damage is done, they'll walk away, claim their insurance pay-out and leave taxpayers to foot the horrendous clean-up bill, or worse still, no clean-up is even possible...

Our community will bear the broken promises, the regret, the health risks and the damage for decades.

And the land and nature will bear the scars forever.

I implore you to recommend the rejection of this plan.

Protect Ellenbrook Fields for the thousands of surrounding residents who depend on it right now, and for the decades to come.

Protect our air, our water, our health, and our future.

Thank you so much for listening.

Vanessa (Adorni) Meader