

BAL/7/3

HATFIELD AERODROME

Town and Country Planning Act 1990, Section 78

Application for the establishment of a new quarry on land at the former Hatfield Aerodrome, including a new access onto the A1057, aggregate processing plant, concrete batching plant and other ancillary facilities, together with the importation of inert fill materials for the restoration of the minerals working

Application Ref. 5/0394-16

Section 78 Appeal against refusal of planning permission by Hertfordshire County Council.

Appeal Ref. APP/M1900/W/21/3278097

**Proof of Evidence (Summary) of Chris Lowden BSc
(Hons) MRICS, MIQ – Planning Policy**

- 1 My name is Christopher Lowden. I hold a Bachelor of Science degree in Minerals Estate Management having graduated in 1990. I am a Member of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) and Institute of Quarrying. I have over thirty years' experience in minerals and waste planning obtained through employment both in industry and consultancy sectors.
- 2 The Appeal is in respect to the refusal by Hertfordshire County Council to grant planning permission for a new sand and gravel quarry, with ancillary infrastructure at the site of the former Hatfield Aerodrome, near H. The proposals would allow the extraction and processing of 8Mt of sand and gravel at a rate of 250,000tpa.
- 3 A request has been made to consider the appeal on the basis of a revised scheme whereby the concrete batching plant is removed from the development in line with a planning application submitted in September 2021. This scheme also moves the access road by 5m into the site and proposes a longer length of acoustic fence. In view of this I have considered both schemes in my evidence.
- 4 In my evidence (BAL/7/1) I have considered the appeal proposals in the context of planning policy, having regard to:
 - relevant planning policy and how this has been considered in the Planning Officer's Report;
 - A brief consideration of points raised by Rule 6 Parties and 'signposted' where the issues are addressed within the submitted information.
 - The effects of the Appeal Scheme on the Green Belt;
 - The Planning Balance and Conclusions;
- 5 The analysis of planning policy has been set out in several documents, notably the Planning Statement, Chapter 4 of the Environmental Statement and the Officer's reports to committee. I have considered the Officer's reports in relation to relevant planning policies and the planning balance reached. I agree with the officer's conclusions in relation to planning policy and that planning permission should be granted.
- 6 In relation to the Green Belt, which I consider to be the main issue for the Appeal in terms of planning policy, the first question I have to answer is whether the Appeal Scheme is appropriate or inappropriate development in the Green Belt.
- 7 The stating point is that mineral development is appropriate in the Green Belt and that a certain degree of ancillary infrastructure (built development) is acceptable (otherwise the policy in the NPPF is neutered). I then have to go on to consider openness and Green Belt purposes.
- 8 To be able to provide saleable aggregates, mineral extraction needs ancillary development to process (crush, wash and screen) the excavated sand and gravel. It also needs bunds to mitigate the environmental effects, as well as providing for the storage of soil resources stripped from the working area, along with overburden. Finally, roads are required to allow extracted material to be transferred to the plant, and aggregates to be exported to the market. Whilst I note that the Council has suggested

the use of conveyors, I agree with Mr Gregor Mutch that they would not be appropriate for the Appeal Scheme.

- 9 I have considered each of these aspects of ancillary development and how they impact upon openness. I consider that these developments are necessary to facilitate the extraction of sand and gravel and that they are not excessive. Overall, I have found that the effect on openness and Green Belt purposes to be limited. I therefore consider the alternative scheme (Scheme 2) to be appropriate in the Green Belt and as such, VSC do need to be demonstrated.
- 10 The introduction of a concrete batching plant to the plant site does not, in my opinion, significantly diminish openness when viewed in the context of the overall plant site. It is located centrally, immediate to the west of the aggregate processing plant. The inclusion of the additional buildings and infrastructure associated with the concrete batching plant would diminish the level of openness, which would be greatest when viewed from the south within the Appeal Site (on the permissive paths). However, it would be viewed in the context of the aggregate processing plant and the concrete batching plant represents a very small element of the overall plant site (around 3%), increasing the footprint of buildings by around 22%.
- 11 Accordingly, I consider that a scheme including a concrete batching plant is also appropriate in the Green Belt.
- 12 Finally, it is important to note that the effects of both schemes are not permanent and so the proposals do not affect the ‘permanence’ of the Green Belt.
- 13 In considering the planning balance I have concluded that the Appeal Scheme accords with the adopted development plan. In particular, I note that the St Albans District Local Plan permits mineral extraction in the Green Belt and that the Appeal Site is specifically allocated in the Minerals Local Plan.
- 14 I have also concluded that the Appeal Scheme is compliant with the policies in the emerging Minerals Local Plan. Again, I note that the Appeal Site is included as an allocated site, forming a fundamental part to the future supply of aggregates. A number of environmental matters have been raised by members of the planning committee in RfR and by the Rule 6 parties. These have been fully addressed in the ES and the Officer’s reports. The specialist evidence provided in this appeal also makes clear that there are no adverse effects in terms of noise, dust or ground water which would not be appropriately controlled and mitigated.
- 15 Whilst I have concluded that the Appeal Scheme is appropriate development in the Green Belt, if the Inspector comes to any different conclusion on this point, it is clear to me that there are a number of substantial benefits that the scheme offers that can be considered to be VSC. These very same benefits also weigh in favour of the Appeal Scheme when considering the planning balance.
- 16 In summary therefore, I conclude the following:

1. In relation to Green Belt the Appeal Scheme would have limited impact upon openness and can be considered to be appropriate development in line with paragraph 150 of the NPPF.
2. Great weight is to be given to mineral development.
3. There is an urgent need for the release of mineral reserves in Hertfordshire which the Appeal Scheme would provide.
4. The Appeal Scheme is in accordance with the strategy of the Mineral Local Plan and complies with Development Plan policy.
5. Minerals can only be worked where they occur and within Hertfordshire and elsewhere around London, this will be within the Green Belt.
6. Whilst the impacts to the Green Belt would be over the long term, the impacts are still temporary and reversible and so are not permanent, with a high quality restoration scheme coming forward during the development with associated public access.
7. Like the planning officer, I consider the positive aspects of the scheme from the point of view of public amenity to be:

- restoration compatible with use of the land as Park
- permanent extensions to the rights of way network
- long term enhancement to the setting of Popefield Farm
- potential net biodiversity enhancements from restoration
- continued public access to the land during operations via permissive paths

8. Even if the Appeal Scheme were found to be inappropriate, significant VSC exist which would clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt, and any other harm.

17 Accordingly, it is my conclusion that the planning balance weighs heavily in favour of the Appeal Scheme.

18 On this basis, I respectfully invite the Inspector to allow the appeal.

EUROPEAN OFFICES

United Kingdom

AYLESBURY

T: +44 (0)1844 337380

BELFAST

belfast@slrconsulting.com

BRADFORD-ON-AVON

T: +44 (0)1225 309400

BRISTOL

T: +44 (0)117 906 4280

CARDIFF

T: +44 (0)29 2049 1010

CHELMSFORD

T: +44 (0)1245 392170

EDINBURGH

T: +44 (0)131 335 6830

EXETER

T: + 44 (0)1392 490152

GLASGOW

T: +44 (0)141 353 5037

GUILDFORD

T: +44 (0)1483 889800

LONDON

T: +44 (0)203 805 6418

MAIDSTONE

T: +44 (0)1622 609242

MANCHESTER (Denton)

T: +44 (0)161 549 8410

MANCHESTER (Media City)

T: +44 (0)161 872 7564

NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

T: +44 (0)191 261 1966

NOTTINGHAM

T: +44 (0)115 964 7280

SHEFFIELD

T: +44 (0)114 245 5153

SHREWSBURY

T: +44 (0)1743 23 9250

STIRLING

T: +44 (0)1786 239900

WORCESTER

T: +44 (0)1905 751310

Ireland

DUBLIN

T: + 353 (0)1 296 4667

France

GRENOBLE

T: +33 (0)6 23 37 14 14