

Hatfield Aerodrome Quarry Appeal Hearing

APP/M1900/W/21/3278097

Statement by County Councillor John Hale, Colney Heath & Marshalswick

Inspector,

I am the County Councillor for the Colney Heath & Marshalswick division of Hertfordshire County Council having first been elected to the council in 2017 after the quarry was first approved, subject to conditions subsequently not complied with, by the county council in January 2017.

Thank-you for permitting me to make this statement to the enquiry.

As you will know from the various maps and plans, the quarry site lies on the boundary of St Albans District and Welwyn Hatfield Borough. The division I represent covers that part of the site within St Albans and I represent on the county council the residents of Smallford, including those whose properties are adjacent to the quarry site.

The quarry site is part of a larger site that was designated as a country park when the Hatfield Aerodrome was redeveloped for housing, commercial use and as a site for the University of Hertfordshire.

It is, as you know, in the Green Belt and acts to stop the coalescence of St Albans and Hatfield. More importantly it is a **public open space** provided for the enjoyment of residents. I would like you to keep that matter in mind as the enquiry progresses, this is not a farmer's field or another piece of land with limited public access. This is and should remain a public open space.

You have identified seven preliminary issues that you consider are likely to be the main issues. I do not propose to comment on all of them, over the next few days others will comment in detail. I do however want to make the following points.

One of the purposes of the Green Belt is to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another. I expect to hear arguments that digging holes in the Green Belt does not run contra to that purpose and that quarrying is permitted in the Green Belt. I accept those arguments, but building bunds, fences, roads and facilities on this site will impact on the Green Belt, especially as that infrastructure will run from the edge

of Hatfield to Smallford effectively joining the two communities. The applicant has recognised this by seeking to remove the concrete batching plant from the site as evidenced by their second application, but that will still leave other structures. This site is too constrained by developments on three sides to be quarried.

You have set aside a day to consider the Bromate plume and I will not take time now, except to urge very careful consideration of the arguments the residents will put forward as to why this quarry presents a real threat to the drinking water for the area. Why when CEMEX have multiple restrictions placed on their activities, including a prohibition on extraction in the Lower Mineral Horizon would Brett on an adjacent site be proposing to extract from the LMH?

As I have mentioned, this site is a country park with public access across the site with few limitations. The proposal would remove much of the park from public access and would impact the enjoyment of much of what remains – I know the applicant has said access will be maintained when areas are not being actively quarried, but that access will be marred by the presence of bunds and fences and by the sound of activities when quarrying is taking place. It will no longer be the country park I cycled through to get to the enquiry today.

The site should have been transferred to a trust at least a decade ago, but the landowner has repeatedly failed to comply with the agreement they entered into when the rest of the aerodrome was developed. In fact, the landowner now appears to be taking actions to reduce the use of the site with the Parkrun not being permitted by the landowner to restart this year. Had the site been transferred to a trust greater effort would have gone into developing the park for the benefit of the residents. Instead the landowner has done the least necessary to avoid legal action.

You have identified the impact the quarry will have on the area, with particular reference to dust, air quality and health. Immediately adjacent to the quarry, in the south east corner, are sports facilities provided by the university for their students and residents. When quarrying activity is taking place no amount of water will prevent dust and other particles being blown through the air across the playing fields. Someone actively exercising will be taking in large doses of that air. In addition to the university facilities, to the west of the site are the playing pitches used by St Albans rugby club and Harvesters (youth) Football Club. Hundreds of young people use those facilities throughout the year. This is in addition to those residents using the remaining parts of the country park.

Since the county council's Minerals plan was adopted in March 2007 additional housing has been built and is being built on the land in Smallford adjacent to this

site. That Mineral Plan proposed that the site should be quarried in the early stages of the plan, yet no action was taken by the landowner then to bring forward this site and almost 10 years passed before a planning application was made in 2016. What might have been an acceptable site in 2007, and I do not think it was even then, is definitely not an acceptable site in 2021.

I am sure it will be argued that the council approved the site in the Minerals Plan and again in 2017 when the development control committee authorised its approval, subject to some conditions, which were then not complied with, resulting in the approval lapsing.

Residents have therefore been living with the potential destruction of their local park for almost 15 years. If the quarry is approved, it will not be temporary as far as residents are concerned, the quarrying and remediation will last at least 32 years and if other quarries are anything to go by extensions to that timetable will be sought. Indeed, Cemex have recently had its operations at Hatfield Quarry extended by ten years. I doubt very much that I will still be alive to walk across the reclaimed country park in 2055.

The last 15 years have been marked by numerous occasions when residents have felt they have been ignored and at times deliberately mis-informed. Even as recently as last month the county council issued conflicting notices about the timetable for residents to comment on the latest application for a quarry, with at least five different dates being given. Data has not been provided or been provided late, making it difficult for the residents to assess and comment on.

Information must be published by a public authority in good time for members of the public to be able to digest it and make intelligent representations. The very purpose of this obligation is to put members of the public in a position where they can make sensible contributions to democratic decision making.

On this point, shortly after 10.00pm last night, respondents to the planning application and appeal were sent an email by an officer of HCC advising them that the public enquiry commences at 10.00am today. It also advised residents that at the Inspector's discretion they may be able to express their views. This is yet another example of how information has not been provided to residents in a timely way.

This is not Stockbroker Green Belt where wealthy QCs live who can afford to mount a well-funded campaign against development and launch requests for judicial reviews. This is middle England Green Belt where finances are carefully managed and time is constrained.

Over the last five years, I have been repeatedly impressed by the time and effort the local residents have put into understanding the hundreds of pages of technical documents and, as you will hear, identify the errors and inconsistencies therein. Despite, as I have already mentioned date being provided late in the process.

Those residents feel let down by their council and the Environment Agency, which they consider have failed to properly assess the impact the quarry will have on this

community. They are confused by the heavy handed approach of the Agency to quarrying by Cemex but the almost negligible interest in this site, next door. They feel it was recommended for approval to meet the demands for sand and gravel, regardless of the damage it will do.

The presence of the Bromate Plume, the close proximity of housing and sports facilities, the already heavily used road network means this is not a simple application. Even the applicant has appreciated that with the detail and complexity of the documents they have submitted as to how they claim they will manage the risk to the drinking water, the air pollution, the noise, the traffic etc. etc.

Colney Heath parish, for geological reasons, already has many current and former quarry sites, this is probably one of the last areas in the parish that has not been quarried or built upon and even here it was partially built upon when it was an aerodrome.

The quarry will have no positive impact on the local economy, it will employ at most 10 people, and it is unlikely they will come from the immediate communities. The sand and gravel will be transported away from this area to building projects elsewhere in the country. All the impacts of this quarry on the residents of Smallford and Ellenbrook will be negative.

I have not gone into detail on the various reasons why this application should be refused, others will do so over the coming days. However, I will stress, this is public open space, in an area that has already been extensively quarried. The time has come to call a stop, this is one quarry too far.

County Councillor John Hale

Colney Heath & Marshalswick

16 November 2021