

REGISTERED NUMBER:	5/2018/1955/NAC
APPLICANT:	Mr Colin Haigh Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council
PROPOSAL:	Consultation Only - Outline permission for the change of use of land to airfield with runway and support facilities
SITE:	Historic De Havilland Grass Runway Ellenbrook Fields Hatfield Business Park Hatfield Hertfordshire
APPLICATION VALID DATE:	25/06/2018
HISTORIC BUILDING GRADE:	N/A
CONSERVATION AREA:	N/A
DISTRICT PLAN REVIEW:	N/A
WARD	Adjacent Sandridge

RECOMMENDATION	Advise Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council as the decision maker that the District Council raises objections.
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1. Reasons for Call in to Committee

- 1.1. The proposal has the potential to have District-wide implications.

2. Relevant Planning History

- 2.1. None relevant.

3. Site Description and Background

- 3.1. The site comprises a 25.8ha area of field located to the west of Welwyn Garden City.
- 3.2. The closest part of the site to a village within the District of St Albans City and District Council is Coopers Green around 0.3km to the west.

4. The Proposal

- 4.1. The application being considered by Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council is seeking outline planning permission for the change of use of land to an airfield including support facilities and erection of a clubhouse with access and layout for consideration and all other matters reserved for consideration.
- 4.2. The runway strip would be sited in a north/south alignment measuring 900m x 23m incorporating a runway strip and a runway end safety area of 120m. Associated facilities would comprise two hangars, a clubhouse, car parking and a community viewing area. The hangars would measure 20 x 15m and the clubhouse 30x10m, with parking for 50 vehicles. The runway would be mown grass, the runway end safety area is proposed to remain wild grassland. Access to the site would be off Albatross Road via an industrial park.

- 4.3. Whilst the application is for Outline permission for access and layout, it is necessary to consider the matters that are to be reserved in considering whether the proposal would be acceptable in principle.

5. Representations

5.1. Publicity / Advertisement:

- 5.2. The District Council is a consultee and the responsibility for notifications lies with Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council (WHBC).

5.3. Adjoining Occupiers

- 5.4. WHBC are responsible for consultation. No representations have been sent to the District Council.

6. SADC Consultations:

6.1. Environmental Compliance

- 6.1 Environmental Health would recommend a holding objection until the relevant information is submitted to demonstrate that the proposal would not have an adverse effect upon our local residents and to ensure that adequate precautions are implemented to avoid noise nuisance.

- 6.2 This should include a detailed acoustic noise assessment and further details of operation including estimated number aircraft movements and suggested hours of flight/operation.

7. Relevant Planning Policy

- 7.1. National Planning Policy Framework 2018

8. Discussion

- 8.1. No information has been provided on the anticipated frequency of aircraft movements, the type of aircraft that would use the runway, or how the support facilities will be used or anticipated numbers of users. The Design, Access and Aviation Statement does state that the airfield will include a flying school that would train new pilots who will fly circuits, but very limited additional information has been provided.

- 8.2. Given the potential impacts of the proposal the application would be expected to be supported by technical reports, including relating to landscape and visual impact, environmental impact, noise, flood risk/drainage, ecology/biodiversity, transport/access, and heritage/archaeology. These have not been provided.

- 8.3. St Albans City and District Council (SADC) would raise concerns that the full impact of the proposal cannot therefore be fully assessed on the information submitted with the planning application, and that the documents/information above should be requested. Notwithstanding this, SADC provides comments on the proposal below.

- 8.4. The main issues for consideration:

- The existing use of the site

- Whether the proposal represents inappropriate development in the Green Belt, and if not whether there are any very special circumstances to justify the development.
- Loss of agricultural land
- Impact upon the amenities of nearby residents.

Existing use of the site

- 8.5. The application site is located on part of Ellenbrook Country Park. The country park was secured through the Section 106 agreement attached to the outline permission for the redevelopment of the former Hatfield Aerodrome site. The country park has public access and will be leased to Ellenbrook Park Trust for continued use by the public.
- 8.6. The proposal would result in a large portion of the country park being unable to be used by the public which is directly at odds with the Section 106. This would additionally be the most useable portion, given that the southern section of the park will be worked in sections for minerals.
- 8.7. The proposal would fail to comply with, and would in fact be in direct conflict with, the existing Section 106.

Green Belt

- 8.8. The site is located entirely within the Green Belt and the Green Belt policies of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan will therefore apply. The emerging Local Plan is currently undergoing its Examination in Public, but does not make changes to the overall policy approach.
- 8.9. Paragraph 133 of the NPPF states:
- 8.10. “The government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristic of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.”
- 8.11. Paragraph 146 of the NPPF states:
- “Certain other forms of development are also not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. These are:
- ...e) material changes in the use of land (such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation, or for cemeteries and burial grounds); and...”
- 8.12. The development proposed is a material change of use of the land, and could therefore be considered as appropriate development if it preserved the openness of the Green Belt and did not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.
- 8.13. The proposed development would result in an intensification of the use of the site and would result in encroachment into the countryside. The site is currently arable agricultural land which maintains the openness of the Green Belt. The development would include two hangars and clubhouse which at 300sqm each, and therefore a total of 900 sqm, which will be of a considerable size, and which will inevitably be considerable in height. There would be other physical additions,

consisting of runway lights, car park to accommodate 50 vehicles, picnic/viewing area, fencing and services. This would significantly erode the open nature of the existing site. The addition of these structures is proposed as part of the application and is therefore considered as part of the proposed change of use of the land. As stated above, no information has been provided on the anticipated frequency of aircraft movements, the type of aircraft that would use the runway, or how the support facilities will be used and anticipated numbers of users. Users of the airfield and its associated facilities, and the physical impact of the aircraft, would all contribute to a significantly more intense use of this Green Belt site.

- 8.14. The applicant in paragraph 7.2 of the supporting Design, Access and Aviation Statement states that the proposed airfield is located 'such that the business centres of Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield as well as the University of Hertfordshire can be reached in minutes, leisure and tourism from outside the borough will increase due to the proximity of Brocket Hall and Hatfield House.' The commuters, attendees of the flight school, staff for 30 jobs, regular users of the airfield, together with the potential hundreds of people that may attend events (ref. paragraph 7.4 of the Design, Access and Aviation Statement), will contribute to a significant intensification of the use of the site over the existing use.
- 8.15. Given the amount of activity and built development proposed the proposal would not preserve the openness of the Green Belt, as such it would conflict with the purposes of including land in it. The proposal would therefore be inappropriate development in the Green Belt.
- 8.16. Paragraph 143 of the NPPF states:
- 8.17. "Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances".
- 8.18. Paragraph 144 of the NPPF states:
- 8.19. "When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations".
- 8.20. No very special circumstances are set out in the planning application.
- 8.21. The need for a replacement aerodrome has not been demonstrated. The application acknowledges that the Panshanger Aerodrome, which is being proposed to be re-sited at the application site, was closed in 2014.
- 8.22. Paragraph 104 of the NPPF states that:

"Planning policies should...f) recognise the importance of maintaining a national network of general aviation airfields, and their need to adapt and change over time – taking into account their economic value in serving business, leisure, training and emergency service needs, and the Government's General Aviation Strategy".
- 8.23. The proposal would not result in maintaining an existing airfield as Panshanger Aerodrome closed in 2014. Although the applicant states the airfield would increase leisure and tourism, would contribute to the University of Hertfordshire and create around 30 jobs, insufficient evidence has been submitted to fully

assess any economic value. Any benefits of the proposal demonstrated do not outweigh the harm to the Green Belt stated above.

- 8.24. The proposal would therefore be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and no very special circumstances have been demonstrated.
- 8.25. As such on the basis of the information submitted with the application the proposal appears to be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and a case for very special circumstances to justify the development needs to be provided. In the absence of such a case to overcome any in principle and actual harm caused by the proposal, objections are raised to the submitted proposal.

Historic Environment

- 8.26. The applicant has provided no supporting information on the impact of the proposal on the historic environment. The site is in close proximity to areas of archaeological significance and to the Grade II* Flight Test Hangar and Grade II listed buildings including Astwick Manor and Old Ford Cottage.
- 8.27. A Heritage Statement should have been submitted which should fully assess the heritage assets that may be affected by the proposal, in accordance with paragraphs 189 and 190 of the NPPF.

Amenities, including noise pollution, air quality and light pollution

- 8.28. It is expected that concerns will be raised in relation to the noise generated by the airfield and associated events, both on the ground and by the aircraft in the air.
- 8.29. The NPPF states in paragraph 180 that:

“Planning policies and decisions should also ensure that new development is appropriate for its location taking into account the likely effects (including cumulative effects) of pollution on health, living conditions and the natural environment, as well as the potential sensitivity of the site or the wider area to impacts that could arise from the development. In doing so they should:

- a) mitigate and reduce to a minimum potential adverse impacts resulting from noise from new development – and avoid noise giving rise to significant adverse impacts on health and the quality of life;
- b) identify and protect tranquil areas which have remained relatively undisturbed by noise and are prized for their recreational and amenity value for this reason; and
- c) limit the impact of light pollution from artificial light on local amenity, intrinsically dark landscapes and nature conservation.”

- 8.30. The site is a country park where it would be expected to be tranquil, and it would not be expected that noise generating uses would be present within the park. Residents in the locality are already affected by the noise generated by aircraft departing from London Luton Airport (LLA), and the proposed airfield would exacerbate this issue. Of particular concern is the additional noise that would be generated for the site’s use as a flight school. Properties do not have to be located directly under a flight path to be overflown, and the repeated use of the same circuit at a low height will be detrimental to the amenity of local residents. The applicant is also incorrect to state in paragraph 1.1 (page 10) that “The circuit proposed avoids overflying any

houses...". It can be seen from the map submitted that the south eastern section of Jersey Farm, a residential area, and properties adjacent to the Hatfield Road/Oaklands Lane roundabout, are located directly underneath the circuit.

- 8.31. Concerns have been raised by residents in relation to air pollution from LLA, and the aircraft using the airfield will, again, exacerbate this issue.
- 8.32. No information has been submitted relating to the hours of use of the proposal, and therefore it has the potential to be used outside daylight hours. The runway lights would result in light pollution in this rural, and predominantly dark, location and would have the potential to detrimentally impact on local ecology.
- 8.33. The proposal would fail to comply with paragraph 180 of the NPPF.

Proximity to London Luton Airport

- 8.34. The site is located within the LLA aerodrome safeguarding zone. St Albans Council would expect LLA to be consulted on the proposal to avoid any conflict in the airspace.

Highways

- 8.35. It is expected that HCC's Highways will respond in terms of highways impacts. No Transport Statement has been submitted.
- 8.36. The applicant states that access will be gained from the access road off Albatross Way. The access road is currently a concreted track which is not used by public vehicles and is used by the landowner, Arlington, for maintenance. Although limited information has been submitted on the likely traffic movements that the proposal would generate, the track would be wholly unsuitable to accommodate the 'hundreds of people' that the Design, Access and Aviation Statement has indicated could attend events, as well as the attendees of the flight school, other users of the airfield, staff and commuters.

Conclusion

- 8.37. Insufficient information has been submitted to allow a full assessment of the proposals to be made. On the basis of the information provided, it is recommended that objections are made on the following grounds:
- 8.38. The proposed development would be in direct conflict with the S106 attached to the outline permission for the redevelopment of the former Hatfield Aerodrome site.
- 8.39. The proposed change of use and support facilities, including a clubhouse and two hangars, would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt as it would have not preserve the openness of the Green Belt in this location. The benefits identified by the applicant would not amount to 'very special circumstances' to overcome the harm by reason of inappropriateness or any other harm.
- 8.40. The proposal would likely have a detrimental impact on the natural environment, nearby heritage assets and local road network. An airfield in this location would likely have negative noise and air quality impacts on local residents. Insufficient information has been submitted to demonstrate that no harm would arise from the proposal in relation to these matters.

8.41. It is recommended that an objection is raised to the application as the proposed development would be contrary to the aims of the NPPF.

RECOMMENDATION: Objection

Decision Code: Obj

St Albans City and District Council recommend to Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council as the decision maker that objections are raised as follows:

- Insufficient information has been submitted to allow a full assessment of the proposals to be made. On the basis of the information provided, it is recommended that objections are made on the following grounds:
- The proposed development would be in direct conflict with the S106 Agreement attached to the outline permission for the redevelopment of the former Hatfield Aerodrome site.
- The proposed change of use and support facilities, including a clubhouse and two hangars, would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt as it would have a greater impact on openness than the existing use. The benefits identified by the applicant would not amount to 'very special circumstances' to overcome the harm by reason of inappropriateness and any other harm has not been made.
- The proposal would likely have a detrimental impact on the natural environment, nearby heritage assets and local road network. An airfield in this location would likely have negative noise and air quality impacts on local residents. Insufficient information has been submitted to demonstrate that no harm would arise from the proposal in relation to these matters.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

Officer Sarah Smith

Section 65 Parties

Plans on website <http://www.stalbans.gov.uk/planning/Searchforplanningapplications/default.aspx>

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Hertfordshire
AL8 6AE.

Our Ref: 5/18/1955
Please ask for: Sarah Smith
Direct Dial:
E-mail: planning@stalbans.gov.uk
Date: 15 August, 2018

Dear Sir/Madam,

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990

Site: Historic De Havilland Grass Runway Ellenbrook Fields Hatfield Business Park Hatfield Hertfordshire

Planning Application: 5/2018/1955

Proposal: Consultation Only - Outline permission for the change of use of land to airfield with runway and support facilities

The above proposal was considered at the Council's Planning Referral Committee of 13th August 2018, where it was resolved that the Council raises objections to the proposed development.

Insufficient information has been submitted to allow a full assessment of the proposals to be made. On the basis of the information provided, objections are made on the following grounds:

- The proposed development would be in direct conflict with the S106 attached to the outline permission for the redevelopment of the former Hatfield Aerodrome site
- The proposed change of use and support facilities, including a clubhouse and two hangars, would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt as it would have a greater impact on openness than the existing use. The benefits identified by the applicant would not amount to 'very special circumstances' to overcome the harm by reason of inappropriateness and any other harm has not been made.
- The proposal would likely have a detrimental impact on the natural environment, nearby heritage assets and local road network. An airfield in this location would likely have negative noise and air quality impacts on local residents. Insufficient information has been submitted to demonstrate that no harm would arise from the proposal in relation to these matters.

As such an objection is raised as the proposal is contrary to the NPPF.

Yours faithfully



Tracy Harvey
Head of Planning & Building Control