

4 Selwyn Avenue
Hatfield
Hertfordshire
AL10 9NP

10th December 2018

Ref Application: 6/2018/2768/OUTLINE

To the planning committee,

I write to formally object to the above planning application for a large-scale mixed use development on the Hatfield Business Park area, including a large proportion of Ellenbrook Fields.

I have lived in Hatfield with my husband since [redacted], and moved to the Ellenbrook area of Hatfield in [redacted]. We have chosen to make Hatfield our home, and plan to stay in the area for the long term, however, with this proposed development, the vision we had for the town we chose to settle in, will have changed enormously. One of the primary factors that drew us to the area was the presence of the large, open space adjacent to our home.

As I reviewed the documentation for the proposed development, I was struck at the amount of information that had been included to be able to provide an informed response. The review period allocated as part of the consultation process did not seem to be proportionate to the volume of material submitted with the application. It may appear that the volume of information provided was designed to overwhelm, and not to aid neighbours' decision making. With the amount of information provided, the timescales provided to respond were extremely short, not giving enough time to review, analyse and disseminate information effectively, during a time of year which is already busy. Furthermore, the evaluation of impacts presented in the documentation was primarily limited to the development area itself, with limited discussion of the effects on surrounding neighbourhoods. Adding 1,100 homes to the area would have a permanent and significant effect on the local community and infrastructure which was not evident in many of the conclusions set out in the environmental impact assessment.

Ellenbrook Community Park is an area of enormous worth, with intangible value to the community as a whole. Part of this is about the access to wide open green space, an ever increasingly threatened vital resource for health and wellbeing, providing a safe area for cyclists, runners, walkers, and children to play. I also use the Ellenbrook Country Park every day to walk my dog, and have found it an invaluable way of connecting to the local community, something which is increasingly hard to do. This is not just a piece of unused open space, this is a hub for the community, for individuals, and for nature.

My objection to the proposed development is based on a number of reasons, set out below:

1. **This is Green Belt Land.** The Government policy on Green Belt is laid out in the National Planning Policy Framework which is in effect to avoid large scale developments such as this on Green Belt Land. The Welwyn Hatfield Green Belt Purpose Review Stage 2 from June 2016 reiterates the need to retain strong Green Belt boundaries, and states that: *"If it is decided that exceptional circumstances exist for altering the Green Belt boundary it will be necessary to take the findings of this review into account alongside the need to promote sustainable patterns of development."* I

cannot see why this development should fall under 'exceptional circumstances'. Green Belt purposes are to; prevent the sprawl of London, Stevenage or Luton and Dunstable, prevent towns from merging, to protect the countryside from encroachment, and to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.

This development proposal will certainly impact on at least two of these purposes, with the Countryside being negatively impacted, removing a large amount of scrubland, grassland and established vegetation, as well as a building on a historic area of Hatfield, the old airfield.

Paragraph 145 of The National Planning Policy Framework sets out a number of developments which are appropriate in Green Belt Land, none of which are met by this development. These are quoted in the Welwyn Hatfield Green Belt Study of 2018.

2. **This is not the Local Plan, this is in addition to it.** The Local Plan has not yet been agreed, however it is proposed that there will be large scale development, creating a new village 'Symonshyde'. This is already, sadly, going to impact negatively on more Green Belt Land, on an even more densely wooded and nature rich area of land. The Local Plan of 'Symonshyde' is meeting the Government's push for Green Belt land to be released for housing, we do not need another huge development in a neighbouring area in the historic Airfield site.
3. **This development goes against all recommendations set out in the Green Infrastructure Plan 2011.** The Green Infrastructure Plan 2011 states that *"Access to freely available natural and semi-natural space is more restricted in Hatfield than in other parts of the Borough. There is also significant deficiency in lateral links and access routes. Whilst there are notable semi natural assets such as Hatfield Park, this is in private hands, with generally limited (paid) access to the majority of visitors. There is therefore a need for enhanced links to the wider countryside and to primary GI assets such as Heartwood, Ellenbrook Fields Country Park and the Lee Valley, as well as to the countryside within the Watling Chase Community Forest (WCCF) area."* By building a large development on such a key part of Hatfield green space, the natural and semi-natural space will be even more restricted, pulling away from the recommendations in this report, to increase links to the wider countryside.
4. **Potential for flooding.** The grassland in Ellenbrook Fields provide an ecosystem service to the surrounding area, capturing rainfall and helping to manage the risk of flooding in surrounding areas. The removal of a large, permeable area of grassland introduces a greater risk of flooding to the areas adjacent to the development. The surrounding areas, including those around my property repeatedly suffer from flooded roads during heavy rain and will be put under increased strain of flooding as a result of the development, and increased area hard surface in the area.

The Environmental Statement: Chapter 13 seems to give the impression that the waterways can already cope with the amount of strain the system is under however the focus of the chapter is primarily on the flood risk within the development area, and only mentions in passing the impact on surrounding areas.

I disagree with the conclusions drawn in the Environmental Statement on flood risk wholeheartedly as it has inadequately assessed the impact on surrounding areas. I have attached a photograph of the front of my house following some recent rain. Following an investigation by the Council, I was told that this flooding was not due to a blockage, but was potentially due to the size of the pipes

unable to cope with the volume of rain. I was unable to exit my driveway onto the road without my feet being submerged in water.

It has also been identified in Chapter 13 of the Environmental Statement that there is an increased risk in flooding for the surrounding areas during the construction period. This has been marked as a low probability of flooding. When undertaking searches on our house that we recently purchased, we were informed that our property falls in an area which is at risk for flooding already, so I disagree with this statement.

Retaining Ellenbrook Fields as natural, undeveloped land supports the Green Infrastructure Plan (2011) which states that *“Utilisation of the flood zones between Hatfield and Welwyn Garden City and smaller outlying villages to the north as multifunctional greenspace should be a priority for the settlements. Expansion of wetland habitat and features within the river catchments and flood zones to create more flexible and adaptive response to managing flood risk. Also the creation of soft and flexible solutions to flood defences (‘spaces for water’) and around pinch points reflecting landscape character of the valley landscapes, is often more appropriate than(sic) engineered solutions.”* The proposed development contravenes the plan guidance.

Increasing the number of properties on the water network, and increasing the pressure on drainage systems that were not designed to cope with the volume of water is likely to increase the flood risk to the areas surrounding the development area. This will have impacts on house prices, insurance rates and potential damage to existing properties.

- 5. Impact on the Road Network.** There are many cars on the road currently leading to high density traffic especially at peak times. Hatfield Business Park contributes a high number of vehicles for commuters, as well as a large number of residential dwellings. By building 1,100 dwellings, there will be an enormous increase in road users, whether this will be by car, motorbike or by bicycle. The direct and indirect impacts associated with the traffic conditions in the surrounding area does not appear to have been adequately considered in the planning application documentation.

The increased density of vehicles may lead to an increased risk of road traffic collisions, and a decrease in safety within these areas. The government is encouraging children to walk to and from school, something which would be more dangerous with the presence of construction vehicles on the road, as well as the increase in traffic post development completion.

Albatross Way is marked as high risk for impact of increased traffic and the proposal shows, in Chapter 12 of the Environmental Statement, that there is likely to be an increase in 12.4% of total vehicles with a 37.5% increase in HGV vehicles in the morning. Albatross Way it is right next to the university, to the sports centre for the university and a care home. The foot traffic on this road presents a high risk for road traffic collisions and a high risk to safety of pedestrians. This is also a road that can only be exited by buses currently. This either means that there will need to be the creation of an area for these vehicles to turn safely, or an opening of the route on Albatross Way onto the A1057, which currently is not in place to manage traffic flow and safety within this area. The opening of this access for construction vehicles onto the A1057 will therefore open the access to other road users, making the congestion along this already extremely busy road increase significantly.

6. **Increased pressure on the Train Network.** I note that the Consultation documents give information about the train network, routes and timings, as well as the Bus network, however there is no mention of the impact that 1100 new dwellings would have on these transport links. The train timetable has recently changed resulting in extremely limited direct trains from London Kings Cross to Hatfield, and has appeared to completely remove all fast service to Hatfield from Kings Cross. This has had an impact on the number of people who are now forced into fewer services. Hatfield is a town which will become more and more desirable for commuters from London due to the fact that the house prices are more affordable than the surrounding villages and towns, and it has a direct trainline into London. I feel that there has not been sufficient research done into the impact that a huge increase in dwellings would have on the already busy train and bus network

More pressure on already stretched key infrastructure and resources. Since moving to the area I have had to find a new Doctor's surgery. I was lucky to find a surgery which was taking on new patients, however when I went to the designated time to sign up as a new patient, there was a queue which was so long, it snaked out of the door. In order to get an appointment at this surgery, I am told to call when appointments are released, where within 3 hours, all appointments are booked up for several weeks. If you do not get an appointment at this point, you then need to wait for the next wave of appointments to be released. This is one example of an already stretched public sector, where the NHS, police and the fire service are stretched to breaking point. We barely have the infrastructure in place for those who already live here. The addition of one primary school will not balance out the needs of those who are already residents of the area, and of those who would be new residents to the area.

7. **Decrease in Air Quality, both short term and long term.** This large scale development is being proposed in addition to the Local Plan which has not yet formally been agreed. It seems that this situation is being taken advantage of as the impacts of the Local Plan on Air Quality is not being taken into consideration when reviewing this application. The Air Quality will be negatively impacted by the dust generated from construction, from the increased traffic and HGV within the area during construction and by the increase in road users once the development will have been completed. It is also important to recognise the impact that removing large, open space will have environmentally on Air Quality. Areas such as this are key for cleaning air, for generating oxygen and to help balance dense, traffic heavy areas, such as the A1M, and the A1001. It is also important to consider that the University has several outdoor playing fields, pitches and courts in the immediate vicinity of the construction zone, this would have a detrimental effect on those using the facilities.
8. **The potential for water contamination.** There have been findings of bromate and bromide contamination in the groundwater within the vicinity of Hatfield, which have been relatively stable during ongoing monitoring by the Environmental Agency. This is linked to the largest known contamination plume in the UK and have led to a number of in-depth studies. There has been no long term solution put in place to ultimately deal with this contamination, and the aquifer that has been put in place will be put under increased strain, and could potentially lead to supplier issues. This will have an impact on increased cost to the end user. With no long term solution to the water contamination issue, surely there cannot be any argument to go forward with such a large scale development. It is incredibly concerning that there has been no mention of the water contamination issue in the reports commissioned by the developer, and this is something which should be investigated fully. Chapter 8 of the Environmental Statement has mention that the groundwater is not showing signs of odour or sheen. I certainly hope that this is not the extent of the testing of water.

9. The conservation value of the area. Protected species are present in the development area, including badgers, bats, numerous bird species and the great crested newt. The presence of these species should not be underestimated – the diversity of flora and fauna in the area contribute to the character and charm of the undeveloped site. The extent of direct and indirect impacts seems to have been underestimated in the environmental impact assessment, and the mitigation measures set out for the protection of the species seem weak. For example, the great crested newt - the ponds supporting newt populations are likely to be disturbed both during and after the construction activity, likely to cause habitat damage which may have long term effects on the Ellenbrook population of newts. Although it is laid out in the Ecological Impact survey, that these ponds would be managed to enhance their ecological value, the disturbance created by development of land surrounding these ponds, or by 'extensive digging out where appropriate' will have a hugely negative impact. This is one of many species of animal and plant within this area. The creation of nest boxes or nest tubes will in no way make up for the enormous amount of wild land that is an invaluable source of food, water and shelter to the surrounding wildlife. We should be fiercely protecting any area of shrub, grass and woodland, ensuring that the finely balanced ecosystem is supported and encouraged to thrive. Also, the scoping was undertaken over a limited timeframe, if this development were to go ahead, I would expect a more extensive and long term ecology survey to be undertaken to ensure that all potential impacts were considered.

In conclusion, in line with the reasons listed above, I strongly object to the proposed development. The historic Airfield contributes to the character and tranquillity of the area, is well loved by local residents and provides a number of ecosystem services to the neighbouring areas. The proposed development would fundamentally change the nature and character of the space.

I request that you take my objections, and those of my neighbours into account when reviewing and deciding upon this application. I am very happy to provide further information as required, and would be happy to meet with a representative from your planning department to further expand upon my concerns listed above.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs Harriet Redpath

cc: Grant Shapps MP

cc: Cllr Tony Kingsbury – Leader of the Council

cc: Cllr Duncan Bell – Deputy Leader of the Council

cc: Cllr Kieran Thorpe – Leader of the Opposition

cc: Cllr Malcolm Cowan – Leader of the Liberal Democrats,

cc: Cllr Stephen Boulton – Executive Member, Environment and Planning