

Opening Statement by Cllr Roger Hunneman (On behalf of Newbury Town Council, as a Rule 6 Party)

Madam, The two local councils have submitted a joint Statement of Case as the Appeal site falls within both Council's boundaries. The main part of the site falls within Greenham Parish boundaries, the remainder within Newbury Town, however much of the access to the site is from Newbury and the impact of the proposal will be more or less evenly shared between the residents of both Councils. It should be noted that the residents of both Councils have made it clear to their elected representatives that these proposals do not have their support. This has been manifested in unprecedented numbers of letters of objection being sent to the LPA in response to the earlier applications for this site as well as the current one. It has to be said, Madam, that a degree of consultation fatigue and indeed confusion has set in with the multiplicity of applications over the years for both this and the adjoining site.

Both Councils appreciate that there is a shortage of housing both nationally and locally, the challenge is how to provide that housing in a sustainable and environmentally acceptable way without deteriorating irreplaceable natural habitats. All of the three local Councils have declared a Climate Emergency and are actively developing and adopting policies to reflect that. It is very disappointing that the Appellant does not seem to have taken this into account; indeed the proposals for both the layout and type of housing proposed are the same as in earlier applications. My colleague Cllr. Adrian Abbs will be addressing these points in detail later. Likewise Cllr. Chris Foster will be addressing the unacceptable impact of these proposals on the irreplaceable Ancient Woodlands and their interconnectivity together with damage to the ecology of this hitherto untouched and unspoilt tract of countryside.

Accordingly it should be noted that both Councils support all of West Berkshire Council's reasons for Refusal as they now stand - but I will raise some particular issues arising from our Statement of Case.

As set out in our Statement of Case we support the LPA development principle that the whole of the Sandleford site (SSSA) should be developed as a coherent whole in a single planning application. We appreciate that the present application does not propose a link to the Andover Road apart from an existing footpath but other extant planning applications for the adjoining site to the west envisage the use of Warren Road and eventual access to the appeal site. Should these applications receive consent then vehicular access to the appellant's scheme to the Andover Road via Warren Road will be achieved, as it were, by the back door. A Warren Road access to the Sandleford site has caused great concern amongst residents because its junction with the Andover Road being in such close proximity to sensitive receptors such as schools and community facilities. This issue demonstrates the weakness of not having a single application for the whole strategic site. Also because this is not single application for the whole strategic site the Transport Assessment / Transport Policy that cover the whole site should be discounted – although we note that the figures have been adjusted (at the risk of being less accurate). As it stands, the lack of a coherent joint implementation of the build-out of both parts of the SSSA means more traffic on Monks Lane and a significant impact on Active Travel choices.

We note that the development of these lands was originally proposed in WBC Core Strategy 2006-2026 and that it is unlikely that Sandleford Park will deliver any new homes by 2026. The models used for housing delivery in the Strategy are out of date and have insufficient regard for the ever increasing levels of conversions of premises to residential use under Permitted Development rights. Consequently in the Document CD17.32 "West Berkshire Council: March 2021 Five Year Housing Land Supply at December 2020" Section 4 Para 4.3 it is stated that "the Council can demonstrate a 7.8 years housing land supply against a LHN of 513 dwellings per year including a 5% buffer". Further, Appendix 2, Table b) states that the total deliverable housing supply for 6 year period April 2020 to March 2026 against a LHN of 513 dwellings / year is **8.1** years (and against Core Strategy of 525 dwelling per year it is **6.9** years) These figures do not contain any contribution from the Sandleford sites.

We also note that West Berkshire Council's Environment Strategy (2020a) (section 6.2.5) states that, "a robust and ambitious Local Plan for West Berkshire" that will "guide planning and development up to the year 2036" is "currently going through a process of review" (p.26). WBCs Local Plan Review, now to 2037, which is expected to be completed by early 2023, will address these matters – based on the emerging draft (2020b).

We strongly believe that for these three reasons alone, notwithstanding the important issues of Active Travel, Ecological Impact and Sustainability deficiencies, that the Sandleford site should be reconsidered as part of the revised Core Strategy and Local Plan Review process and that, given the adequacy of the Housing Land Supply, the development of the Sandleford site should be regarded as premature until such reviews are completed. At the very least this would enable a more acceptable, sustainable scheme with significantly less impact on the irreplaceable ancient woodland habitat to be developed. Furthermore it would enable the appellant to design a scheme which would be in accord with the then emerged Environment Strategy and the impact of changed work patterns post Covid.

Elsewhere in our Statement of Case we go into some detail regarding Travel Modelling and Active Travel, this will be covered by Cllr. Tony Vickers later in the inquiry. However, additionally, we have noted the extent of the changes to road junctions in South Newbury as a result of the need to mitigate the effects of the proposed development, whilst improvements to the double roundabout at the west end of Monks Lane are welcome, the vast changes to the A339/Pinchington Lane/Newtown Road/Monks Lane replacing roundabouts with signalised junctions (with an 8 lane interconnection!) is in our view particularly damaging to the local environment and will have an adverse effect on local air quality – especially so as the WBC highways officer feels that traffic can be "held" there in order to lessen the impact on the A339 in central Newbury.

Madam, I have endeavoured not to duplicate matters which my colleague Cllr Tony Vickers has raised in his opening statement, if I have done so, I apologise.

In conclusion we feel that the proposed development does not accord with the current circumstances outlined above and in our Statement of Case. We would hope that this appeal will be refused or at the very least modified or reduced in scope so as to result in a scheme more in accord with dealing with the effects of climate change, having a very much reduced effect on the irreplaceable ancient woodlands and reducing the negative impacts on local residents.