

Opening Statement by Cllr Dr Tony Vickers (on behalf of Greenham Parish Council as Rule 6 Party)

Madam, if you wish for it to be shown on screen, I have produced and sent to the Case Officer a map which illustrates the point made by Cllr Hunneman just now about the way the Sandleford Park core strategy site is split between the two councils..

[The map shows the parish boundaries in bold red lines; the Newbury settlement boundary as a bold black line. The SSSA is coloured pink.]

Note that most of the total area to be built on is in Greenham, although the whole of Sandleford West is in Newbury. The A339 south of Monks Lane is entirely in Greenham and although Monks Lane is entirely in Newbury, beyond an undefined strip of land to its south the rest of the Appeal site, including any expansion land, is in Greenham.

A district council boundary review carried out by the Boundary Commission for England in 2018 created a new Wash Common District Ward for West Berkshire Council, for which I was elected as one of three Members. I also stood for and won one of six seats on Newbury Town Council's Wash Common ward, along with my colleague Roger Hunneman; and was the only candidate elected for the newly created Sandleford ward of Greenham Parish Council, which covers all of the parish west of A339 but currently has just 4 electors.

So I'm the only person who can claim to represent the whole SSSA locally.

Since the Appeal was lodged, a joint working group of councillors – three from each council - have met five times to agree recommendations to their respective Councils. This resulted in our joint Statement of Case.

Neither council had set aside money to pay for professional help with participation in planning for Sandleford. We have no paid in-house planning officers, so it was necessary for us to represent ourselves.

Madam, I'm sure it won't have escaped you that the Statement of Case of the two local councils, whose shared boundary splits the Appeal site and who therefore decided to share the same Statement, has a common theme in all the topics we choose to bring to your attention. That theme is the Climate Emergency.

Madam, we recognise there is a housing crisis and consequently immense pressure from Government to boost the rate of delivery of new homes. But a crisis isn't quite as serious as an emergency. There is no point in delivering thousands of new homes if the Planet we all share is going to become uninhabitable well within the lifetimes of their occupants – as the science says will be the case if we do not all act now in every possible way we can. Doing the minimum that planning law requires isn't going to be enough.

In any case, as we point out in our Statement (at 2.B.2), there is no urgency about delivering those new homes here in West Berkshire, as Cllr Hunneman has pointed out. He will cover that and other aspects of the Planning Framework that are part of our Case. Both councils are part of the Newbury Settlement Area and he is leading for Newbury's council.

In this year of COP26 especially, surely no UK Government Minister can perhaps within weeks of hosting this global summit on the subject dare to ignore the facts of Climate Change? He or she would be giving consent to 1000 homes designed to standards now widely recognised as inadequate. Standards imposed by central Government against the better judgement of Local Government – this LPA - 10 years ago.

Our LPA's new Local Plan will very soon reach its Regulation 19 stage and we know it will be stronger on Climate Change, as is the NPPF since the current Local Plan was adopted as policy here.

Our Case rests upon the fact that if we need these houses on the SSSA at all, we need them to be future-proofed against the impacts of Climate Change. Before you deliver your report to the Secretary of State Madam, I expect we will all have seen the submission draft of the new Local Plan. Will that carry weight in your report? I hope so.

This is not a party political issue. Nationally as well as locally, there is cross party support for taking action to address what all see as the Climate Emergency. Our two councils are simply "doing our bit" in pressing this case.

But we are not the decision makers. We are not planning professionals. We merely represent the views – and what we believe to be the best interests – of our local

communities. Literally 're-presenting' those views is certainly what I see as my role in your Inquiry madam.

Just weeks ago Government announced a more challenging target for reduction in carbon emissions. They say it will be enshrined in legislation. It commits to a reduction of 85% by 2035.

Despite claims that Sandleford will be complete by 2031, I doubt very much whether all the new homes will be occupied before then.

Our two councils supported all the original reasons for refusal in the LPA's Decision Notice. We also accept that a few of these Reasons have now been dealt with satisfactorily by negotiation between main parties. But at least one of the Reasons in the Statement of Common Ground remains disputed by us as is explained in our joint Statement of Case.

I'll briefly now outline aspects of that joint Case that are most relevant to Greenham Parish Council. These are: firstly access for our residents – current and future - to existing schools and other local facilities they need in and near the Appeal site; secondly the carbon footprint of the Appellants' proposed new homes.

Access surely has to cover all modes of travel for all ages and abilities and for every purpose, not just the daily commute. There is very little account in the Appellant's Transport Assessment – which includes its Travel Plan - of the physical fact that Monks Lane sits 50m above the level of the River Kennet. This is a significant dis-incentive for would-be cyclists, which hasn't seemed to be a consideration of those promoting the site and who claim that it offers a Sustainable Transport Strategy.

I will myself be asking you Madam to agree that the predicted level of sustainable travel at peak times is unrealistic, in the sessions starting this afternoon. That is despite what is in the Statement of Common Ground on transport and highways issues generally. None of the Rule 6 parties claim expertise in traffic modelling but we do know our own area and we do not accept that the 2011 census SOA chosen as the baseline for modal split predictions is representative of the Appeal site. However good the modelling

software, if you have flawed input data assumptions, the output from the model will also be flawed.

Then if work starts on site by destroying a quarter of the main cycle route along Monks Lane, which is used by many of the 300 pupils attending Park House School but living east of the A339 mainly in Greenham parish, you will get modal shift straight away in the opposite direction to what the Appellants claim their development will achieve. Nothing in the proposed design and location of future cycle routes through or adjacent to the site is going to reinstate that cycle path to what it was – let alone improve conditions for those pupils to cycle to school in future.

My colleague Adrian Abbs will explain how inappropriate the layout of roads and dwellings on the Appeal site is, in his opinion as someone with experience in the business, in respect of renewable energy. As submitted, the potential for converting solar energy to electricity from the south facing aspect of the site is being lost.

We realise layout is severely constrained by the landform and location of ancient woodland. That is precisely why we think this matter is crucial to have resolved at this stage. Layout of dwellings is linked to layout of roads to serve them and therefore the whole land use framework of the SSSA looks inadequate and access to the neighbouring highway network would need reworking.

Madam, from 16th May to 24th inclusive I will be unavoidably absent from your Inquiry. In my absence, I am authorised by Greenham Parish Council to have my town council colleague Mr Hunneman to act as Advocate for both councils if necessary. The only witness whom I shall be calling is my Greenham parish council colleague Adrian Abbs in a week's time.

Finally none of us from the two local councils are currently authorised to commit them to a position other than was in our joint Statement of Case, unless one or both council convenes the appropriate decision making meeting and lets us know what it decides. Unlike the Case Officer of the LPA and his colleagues, we have no delegated powers given to us. What we say at this Inquiry madam is therefore constrained by this but we hope nevertheless that the arguments we make will be persuasive.