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Tollgate Road  
Colney Heath  
Hertfordshire  
AL4 ■■■

18<sup>th</sup> September 2023

My name is Lesley Bloomfield. I have lived on Tollgate Road for 47 years. There have of course been many changes to the village during that time but one constant is the fact that residents have always been car dependent. In the 1970s and 80s I myself was driven to secondary school in St Albans every day by my mum for 7 years. Even back then learning to drive at the age of 17 was an essential rite of passage for me and my friends to relieve our parents of taxi duties.

There is an extremely limited bus service available to residents. Access roads to and from the village are lethal to pedestrians and cyclists. For example access to our nearest train station at Welham Green is via Tollgate Road. Beyond the village edge it has no footpath, has a 60mph speed limit, is unlit and floods even after moderate rainfall. There is a blind bend where cars often misjudge the severity of the bend and either run off the road or cross the central white line causing danger to oncoming traffic. The long energy sapping hill is unmanageable to the average cyclist. The junction of Tollgate Road with Dixons Hill Road and Swanland Road is a frequent scene of accidents, indeed in 2018 my son's car was written off there when an oncoming car misjudged the junction and turned across his path.

Any trip down Coursers Road (to the nearest big supermarket) will tell much the same story with the added complication of pedestrians and cyclists having to dodge the 8 wheel lorries accessing the bio-digester and the landfill site and having to avoid the mud skid hazard they create. Once past these hazards they then have to try to negotiate the 6 arm roundabout by London Colney which includes the slip road to the M25 and two dual carriageway arms.

The access to Hatfield via the A1(M) underpass is not a realistic option for most residents. Groups of youths frequently congregate there for socialising,

drinking and other reasons. I myself in the past have turned back from using it rather than risk the prospect of walking through them. Even if it is empty it is in an isolated position and the fear of trouble prevents me from using it. It can also not be relied upon for use on a daily basis as it floods after a heavy downpour and becomes impassable. I would certainly not let a child of mine use it on a daily basis.

We are all grateful for the village shop for tops ups and bits and pieces but it clearly will never be able to supply all the day to day needs of a modern family. For weekly food and essentials shopping, there is no choice but to access shops outside the village. This can only be done by car. I am a reasonably fit person in my 50s. The thought of me labouring up the hill on Tollgate Road or trying to dodge the 8 wheelers on Coursers Road by bike or on foot whilst laden down with potatoes and washing powder might suit the script of a comedy program but is not a realistic prospect.

The majority of village children access secondary schools by private cars. The nearest schools mentioned in the developer's documents are either schools for children with emotional or social difficulties or a faith school. These are not schools that the majority of village children would ever attend. In reality most parents will end up driving their children backwards and forwards to school daily, just as I did for nearly 7 years until my son was able to successfully pass his driving test and complete his rite of passage, as I did before him, to become yet one more owner of a car in the village.

All health services have to be accessed outside the village. For example, if when phoning the GP at 8.30am one morning you are lucky enough to get through and be offered an appointment it is likely to be for that same day. The chances of a bus being available to get you there on time is virtually nil and the same for the return journey. As discussed already cycling and walking is not an option. So the choice you have is no choice at all – you have to get in the car and drive yourself there.

I have owned the field that is on the South Eastern boundary of the Appeal site for 30 years. The original field was divided in the early 1990s with my half being separated by a post and wire fence that we installed. I have provided the Inquiry with a Statement of Truth giving my observations of the comings and

goings on the Appeal site as I see them from my boundary on a daily basis. For example when I started to write this statement at the end of last week I could not see any horses grazing on the Appeal site, as since the beginning of August they had undertaken their annual summer migration to graze on a field unconnected with the site. They do this in the summer for up to 4 months every year. I note that today they have now returned to the site, perhaps in preparation for the visit this week. Historical Google Earth images show that the fields have only been used for exercising the horses for the last 7 years. For brevity I will not continue here with a list of reasons and explanations. Suffice to say that it would certainly seem from the evidence available that the Appeal site fields have not been in consistent and continuous equestrian use for the last 10 years, meaning that an intimate association with the stable block cannot be proved.

I note that due to the fact that the development would be a carbuncle on the side of the village and is not contained within the existing built area of the village that the developer plans to plant screening around its boundary. They themselves note that the boundary has sparse hedge growth. Over the last 30 years we have tried on a number of occasions to plant a hedge next to our post and wire fence. These attempts have always met with failure. This year thanks to a grant from the Queen's Green Canopy Fund we were able to plant over 1000 hedge and tree plants along the boundary. Despite the very wet summer and us watering the hedge from a bowser on a daily basis we have still lost about 25% of the plantings in just a few months. Trees and hedges are not a permanent guarantee of screening. The only chance of success for plantings in this area during a normally dry summer would be for extensive daily watering. Given the irreversible nature of the development unless this watering happens daily throughout dry spells and for a number of years there is little expectation of success for the planting proposals to screen the development and mitigate its visual impact.

Both our field and the Appeal site field border on the River Colne. I call this lower field the Water Meadow. This is because it is the flood plain area for the river. During times of moderate to heavy rainfall the river very quickly breaches its banks and floods across the lower field on both sides of the already mentioned post and wire fence. The whole field effectively becomes

part of the river with the flood water flowing as quickly over the field as it does over the river bed itself. When my son was little I kept him well away from this danger area, as I continue to protect my animals today. It is extremely worrying that anyone is considering building family homes so close to this potential danger. The thought of a momentary lapse on behalf of a resident causing an unaccompanied child to enter this flood water so close to their home is very scary and the consequences could be fatal.

Finally to return to the issue of car dependency and the suitability of Colney Heath for a development of this size - it can be seen from the number of residents wishing to speak and make statements that residents are very concerned. For those that have made their way here to be ready on time for the start of this Inquiry is it to be expected that they walked here? Is it to be expected that they cycled here? Is it to be expected that they came by train? Is it to be expected that they could find a bus which would guarantee them a chance to arrive on time and have their voice heard? The answer to all of these questions is no. Virtually everyone here today from the village of Colney Heath will have arrived by private car and will leave by private car.

I could go on but perhaps there is not enough time now to mention Green Belt, traffic congestion and road rage on Tollgate Road near the site, pollution, narrow village pavements, the tonnes of earth dumped in Fredericks Wood on the opposite side of the River Colne to the Appeal site without planning consent or a Flood Risk Assessment which could make the flooding on the site side of the river worse, the fact that the site is outside the developed area of the village and not in keeping with the character of the village, the effect on local heritage assets or indeed many other reasons why this Appeal should not be allowed.

I would like to finish by asking the Inspector to please listen to us the villagers many of whom have lived here for decades as well as to our Parish Council. The village of Colney Heath is not a sustainable location for development and this site is not suitable for development.

Thank you for listening

Lesley Bloomfield