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6<sup>th</sup> October 2011

Your Ref: APP/B 1930/A/09/2 109433

Ms Christine Symes,  
Department for Communities and Local Government,  
Zone 1/H1,  
Eland House,  
Bressenden Place,  
London,  
SW1E 5DU

Dear Madam,

Re. Appeal by Helioslough Ltd, against planning refusal for SRFI Development, nr. Radlett, Herts.

Thank you for your letter of 15<sup>th</sup> September containing an invitation to submit a representation for consideration by the Secretary of State in his re-determination of the above SRFI planning refusal.

I consider that there are new circumstances and information that the Secretary of State should take into account, namely, the recent SRFI planning application at Slough by Goodmans. This included yet another Alternative Sites Assessment in addition to those already considered at the Inquiries, which not altogether surprisingly demonstrates that their site, Colnbrook, is more suitable than is Radlett for an SRFI. This means that we have had three ASAs to date comparing Radlett and Colnbrook with somewhat varying conclusions.

ASA No. 1 undertaken for Helioslough purported to demonstrate that Radlett is the best site for an SRFI. In point of fact, when this ASA was examined carefully it was discovered that it contained several arithmetic errors and, when these were corrected, this ASA actually showed that Radlett was *not* the best site (IR 8.125 first Inquiry).

ASA No. 2, again undertaken for Helioslough for their second application, unsurprisingly claimed that Radlett was the best site, by employing altered criteria. However, I note with interest that the Secretary of State in his Decision Letter of the 7<sup>th</sup> July 2010 (paragraph 23) does not appear to have been wholly convinced by this ASA.

ASA No. 3 undertaken for Goodmans in their recent application in connection with the Colnbrook site demonstrates that their site is better suited for an SRFI than is Radlett.

All these ASAs were undertaken on behalf of the applicants using criteria of their own choice. It is, then, not surprising that the results were favourable towards the applicant's case. I do not know what mechanism is available but surely the time has come for an unbiased comparison to be made between these two competing applications, and since the SRFI policy is a central government policy the comparison should be conducted by central government using criteria of *its* choosing.



## **Other Matters**

I attended both Inquiries (2007 and 2009) dealing with the Helioslough applications, and spoke at both. Whilst both were conducted in a courteous and helpful manner, I feel very strongly that both the Inspectors virtually ignored the strong cases presented on the important aspects mentioned below, which are of great concern to many thousands of residents in the St Albans – Radlett area.

### **ROADS**

The traffic loading on all the main roads in the area of the proposed SRFI is already at a critical level in busy periods such that any breakdown or accident can, and sometimes does, cause gridlock. The addition of 3000 lorry movements each day plus a similar number of employee cars and service vehicles would add a huge burden on the road system, significantly adding to journey times of all road users including the SRFI traffic, which is cutting quite contrary to the recent government announcement of an increase in motorway speed limits designed to reduce travel times and thereby increase industrial productivity. Not only would the proposed SRFI have no direct motorway access, thus forcing the use of local roads for all its traffic, there can be no certainty that the site would not substantially become a road-to-road interchange, thus increasing the traffic burden still further.


At the first enquiry the Hertfordshire County Highways Authority made known their position to be against this development. In interviews with the press in 2009 (presented as evidence in my December 2009 submission to the second Inquiry) they made it clear that they maintained this position. However, the intimidating prospect of financial reprisals from the appellants that was clearly alluded-to by Helioslough's representative at the St Albans Council Meeting that unanimously rejected the second planning application very effectively dissuaded the Highways Authority from officially stating their views at the second Inquiry. This absence allowed Helioslough to suggest that the Highways Authority had no objection to their proposal. In addition, a report by Capital Highways in April 2009 (reproduced as Appendix 2 in my Inquiry submission, December 2009) described the A414, on which much of the SRFI traffic would travel, as one of the busiest roads in Hertfordshire and stated that "the impact of a rail freight terminal on traffic flow in Park Street would be tremendous".

The change in the road situation since the second Inquiry is the continual gradual increase in traffic density due to new housing continually springing up in this predominantly residential area (with 7.900 new dwellings projected by the East of England Plan between the second Inquiry and 2031), and also to the opening and gradual development of the Butterfly World project in our locality, which is forecast to attract up to one million visitors annually when fully operational. Thus our situation is constantly changing towards increased congestion. In December 2008 the Herts Advertiser carried an article expressing local employers' concerns over the current congestion levels on the roads, which are already having an adverse effect on their operations and employment opportunities. An SRFI situated locally would greatly increase the current congestion and road safety problems, and also increase the already high level of pollution in this residential area.

Although all the above, and more, was carefully presented and sourced, it appears to have played little part in the Inspector's deliberations and recommendation.

### **RAIL**

Both the St Albans District Council and our local Member of Parliament, Mrs Anne Main, presented a devastating case against the use of the St Pancras to Bedford line for SRFI container traffic. Their



presentations dealt with the current inadequacy of track and tunnel sizes, and with the impact that SRFI container traffic would have on the already very busy commuter line. Both these powerful submissions appeared to be virtually ignored and lightly swept aside by the Inquiry Inspector, even though the rail operators expressed serious misgivings about the effects of such an increase of traffic.

### **Conclusion**

I strongly maintain that the grounds for the Secretary of State's refusal in the Decision Letter of July 2010 represent a valid and correct assessment of the situation, in that other sites may satisfy the SRFI requirement whilst inflicting far less damage on the surrounding countryside and human habitation. I very much hope that the robust submissions on the above three aspects made at the Public Inquiries and the change in circumstances introduced by Goodman's application for the Colnbrook site will be given serious weight in the re-determination of the 2010 refusal, and that the Secretary of State will uphold his wise decision of July 2010.

Yours faithfully,

*Ian M. LaRiviere*

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