

Response by Friends of Wigmore Park to Luton Borough Council/Luton Rising responses re New Century Park/Green Horizons Park

Firstly we would like to advise that the planning application for New Century Park (NCP)/Green Horizons Park (GHP), was first lodged with Luton Borough Council (LBC) in December 2017.(1)

Outline Permission for this application was approved by LBC in March 2019. (2)

Funding for the Phase 1 of GHP, the access road, is discussed in this document by the South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP). (3)

As GHP once fell into a Local Enterprise Zone, SEMLEP also discussed it within this document. (4) Section 4 of this document, states that under NCP a key barrier to this project was the funding for the £140 million access road, which meant all development options were potentially unviable.

GHP access road was the key to the project, as it opened up the preferred site for airport expansion on Wigmore Valley Park. It would show potential investors in that airport expansion, be they private investors, future airport concession holders or commercial lenders that should LR/LBC pursue the project on their own, that the site was financially viable, and freely accessible, whilst document (4) clearly states that without the road, the site was not.

We would therefore challenge the applicant's submission that development of the GHP site has commenced, as this initial SEMLEP concern re the financial viability of the site, has still not been met, as the access road still has no funding, and hence is now part of this Development Consent Order (DCO).

Is the applicant saying that they have knowingly started the development of a project that is not financially viable, and that they appear to not have the funding to actually deliver?

We would also challenge whether the commencement of the development has occurred within five years of permission, when that permission expired in March 2024, not June as stated.

The applicant states that the works commencement indicates that the application is still live.

In June 2024 the applicant lodged this application with LBC. (5)

This application is for the first warehousing and industrial space building, within the light industrial quarter of the GHP site. The site sits at the northern end of the current Long Term Car Park.

On Monday 15th July 2024, London Luton Airport Operations Ltd, held one of its quarterly London Luton Airport Consultative Committee meetings. During the LBC slot at this meeting, the Planning Consultant of LBC, Mr D.Gurtler, announced to the meeting that this application had been submitted to keep the GHP application live, and that the facility may not even reach construction. The minutes of this meeting are in draft form at the moment and are not yet a public document.

If erecting some rickety Heras fencing, placing a few wooden stakes in the ground, digging a single hole on the site of the new skate park at Wigmore Valley Park, denotes the commencement of the GHP planning approval, we would like to question why Mr Gurtler made that statement, and why that application was necessary if the original application had been commenced?

Throughout their DCO application, LR/LBC give as a keystone, their promise of a Green Controlled Growth (GCG) mantra, where strict environmental considerations will be enforced, and expansion stopped if these are breached.

We have detailed how despite the lack of any viable funding option, LR/LBC have continued to pursue their GHP development, as it would have delivered the development site on Wigmore Valley Park, and a development access road.

How can Luton residents whose lives will be blighted by this airport expansion, or those in the wider area affected by airport operations, be expected to believe that LR/LBC actually do care about their quality of life, as GCG states, when this obsession over delivering GHP proves otherwise?

We would like to make a final comment on the applicant's claim of commencement of GHP, with their limited earthworks on the replacement skate park.

Outline permission was passed in 2019, yet it has taken the applicant five years to start to provide a facility for the benefit of the citizens of Luton. We can see no reason why such a facility, and indeed the replacement children's play area, could not have been provided sooner.

In the immediate post-Covid years, such facilities would have been welcomed by those citizens as they rebuilt their health and wellbeing.

We would suggest that the development has only started now because it had to, after your request for confirmation that the application was made.

If Government thinks such behaviour is acceptable, rather than actually being a show of contempt for the citizens of Luton, and indeed for the Inspectors who carried out the DCO, by accepting the applicant's version of events, and indeed granting this DCO, they will just be encouraging more such behaviour going forwards.

- (1) <https://planning.luton.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=summary&keyVal=P15LFYKG05100>
- (2) <https://lutonbcouncil-newsroom.prgloo.com/news/plans-for-new-century-park-approved>
- (3) https://www.semlep.com/modules/downloads/download.php?file_name=1662
- (4) https://www.semlep.com/modules/downloads/download.php?file_name=1660
- (5) <https://planning.luton.gov.uk/online-applications/simpleSearchResults.do?action=firstPage>