

STATEMENT OF DAVID JOHN HINDLE

I am here to make a heartfelt plea to the Inspector in connection with the development proposals that are the subject of the enquiry. As a Grimsargh Parish Councillor and long-time resident of the village, I know that I speak on behalf of many Grimsargh residents in objecting to the planning application outlined by Hallam. The precedent of a decision in favour of considerable housing development would spell trouble for our countryside, which is effectively at the gateway to the beautiful Ribble valley. However, my principal objection is that the scale of the development would be prejudicial to the rural identity of Grimsargh, which needs to be carefully preserved. Furthermore in the event of the appeal being upheld I consider it will have an adverse effect on the historic landscape, countryside and diminishing wildlife.

I respectfully submit that I am qualified to speak on environmental and heritage matters for the following reasons: I am a history graduate, life-long naturalist and established author of ten books on local history and natural history including co-authorship of the standard work on Lancashire ornithology: *The Birds of Lancashire and North Merseyside*, which describes in detail the status and distribution of birds in Lancashire. Furthermore I am the author of a book on the history of Grimsargh namely '*Grimsargh: The Story of a Lancashire Village*'(Hindle, 2002) Carnegie Publishing. I note that both of these books have both sourced by specialist consultants commissioned by Hallam in the preparation of reports submitted to this enquiry.

The loss of biodiversity, habitat and beautiful countryside

The on-going expansion of Preston East continues to obliterate the countryside towards Cow Hill and Grimsargh. The loss of the site under review to the south of the disused railway line will have another devastating effect on the landscape and its ecology with consequential desecration of habitat. The term habitat as distinct from locality - alluding to geographical distribution - might be described as a type of environment in which a particular species likes to dwell and for which

it is structurally adapted but as we well know habitats throughout the world are threatened as never before. The area in question at Grimsargh embraces rough pasture, unimproved grassland, ponds and trees interspersed with rare examples of ancient hedgerows.

Despite the measures outlined by the developers for the preservation of hedgerows and certain marl pits, the close proximity of large scale housing will undoubtedly impact on important elements of our flora and fauna, some of which are specially protected under the provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act and European Law. Over several years I have recorded up to four species of amphibians in the old marl pits hereabouts viz: great crested and smooth newt and common toad and common frog and two species of reptile: common lizard and slow worm, located on the former Preston to Longridge railway line's embankments and cuttings. In addition a wide variety of mammals are present ranging from the pygmy shrew to the roe deer. I am well aware of legal measures that have to be implemented by developers to protect endangered species such as the great crested newt and the necessary consultations with ecologists, but nevertheless have serious doubts about the sustainability of diminishing species of wildlife, post large-scale development.

Unfortunately many of the 246 breeding birds in Britain, especially farmland birds are in free-fall decline. Habitat depredation is a crucial factor and sadly, several examples of avian excellence including yellowhammer, skylark, tree sparrow, yellow wagtail, and grey partridge are probably extinct in the habitat under review. Significantly diminishing populations of certain red and amber listed species may still be found breeding on the land that is subject to this enquiry: barn owl, stock dove, lapwing, curlew, reed bunting, house sparrow, starling, curlew, song thrush and whitethroat. Nationally, skylark numbers have plunged by over a million in the past three decades and many countryside birds have declined by almost half. It is sad they are no longer such a quintessential element and embodiment of all that was pure in the English countryside.

Crucially the land proposed for development harbours a few pairs of lapwing that attempt to nest each year with varying degrees of success. This charismatic species symbolises the plight of farmland birds, and its loss makes a compelling environmental statement. Charismatic species such as the lapwing and curlew are obvious similes for the vulnerability of our farmland birds but modern agricultural policy has since the 1970s, had scant regard for wildlife. Many ornithological surveys undertaken by the British Trust for Ornithology have indicated that the reasons for the current loss of many species of farmland birds is predominantly due to the development of green field sites for commercial use and agricultural intensification and therefore this particular relatively unspoilt site is well worthy of preservation for the benefit of future generations.

Preserving the ancient settlement of Grimsargh with Brockholes and the foundation of ancient field systems

Over the last decade the historical dimension of the landscape has received increasing recognition in the United Kingdom. Taken as a whole the land in question ought to remain in situ for it represents a fine example of ancient enclosure patterns and unspoilt Lancashire landscape albeit currently threatened. Apart from being a natural and aesthetically pleasing area of separation maintaining Grimsargh's rural identity, from the urban expansion of Preston, the green fields proposed for substantial housing development, between Church House Farm and the Hills at Grimsargh are a fine example of Grimsargh's historic landscape. Grimsargh is an ancient settlement of Norse origin and the land currently threatened incorporates a mosaic of field patterns enhanced by marl pits and ancient and overgrown hedgerows with profusions of holly, hawthorn, and buckthorn and other diverse trees including oak and alder.

Enclosure of land had a significant impact on the landscape with hedgerows in the lowlands and stonewalls bisecting the upland areas. The familiar but disappearing hedgerows are representative of significant periods in history including the beginning of commercial farming during the Georgian and Victorian periods but also having

their origins in the medieval, Tudor and Stuart periods. These features further characterise the historic landscape around Grimsargh and are predominantly ‘Ancient Enclosure’ - probably of 1400-1500AD origin. As such they are undoubtedly a haven for wildlife, especially farmland birds.

The Hedgerow Regulations 1997 protect important countryside hedges from removal. Wildlife, historical and landscape criteria determine whether a hedge is important or not and old hedgerows are protected under the Hedgerow Regulations, 1997, and as such should be maintained in perpetuity under the original 18th century Enclosures Act. In keeping with the rationale and spirit of the legislation I ask that they be preserved in their natural setting as a feature of the landscape. Finally, at a time when the English countryside and wildlife has never been under so much pressure, I recommend that the application be refused on the grounds that it would be prejudicial to the rural identity of the ancient settlement of Grimsargh, its heritage and natural history and the wider implications for the environment including existing inadequate road facilities.

Appendix – Documents consulted

National Planning Policy Framework

Preston's Local Plan and Local Development Framework

Lancashire County Council Joint Structure Plan

The 'Lancashire Landscape and Heritage SPG' (LCC 2006)

Lancashire County Council Sites and Monuments Record

'A Landscape Strategy for Lancashire' (LCC 2000)

Yours Sincerely,
David John Hindle MA