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

Ma'am, first I'd like to thank you for the way you've treated us Rule 6 participants throughout this marathon. I feel we've been listened to with patience and respect and our views – as well as those we have 're-presented' on behalf of our constituents in the two parishes – have been taken on board to the extent that planning law allows.I hope Ma'am that you have felt our contributions to have have been valuable.

I have confidence that the report you present to the Secretary of State will be fair and balanced and I look forward very much to reading it in due course, alongside the Minister's own final words on the subject.

The 'elephant in the room' has, of course, been the Owner of the site and its contractual relationship with Bloor Homes, though a so-called 'option'. It was only when I got round to reading the Unilateral Undertaking a few days ago that I realised that Sandleford Partnership have different 'skin in the game' to the developer, who has been so ably reprented by Mr Jones and his team. Mr Karkowski of course represents both developer and owner of the Appeal Site, who are joint Appellants.

Over 100 years ago, no less a person than Winston Churchill desribed the role of the landlord in the development industry thus: "Roads are made, railway services are improved [etc.] and all the while the landlord sits still. To not one of these improvements does the land monopolist as a land monopolist contribute, yet by every one of them the value of his land is sensibly enhanced."

Sandleford Partnership have done nothing to make this site increase in value from what it was worth as farmland and a shooting estate to what it became worth when the Local Planning Authority allocated it for housing – except respond to a Call for Sites. They own a site which happens to be adjacent to a very prosperous town which has excellent communications and a delightful hinterland. They are entirely passive partners in all this, unlike Bloor Homes, the Planning Authority, and the hard working local families of Newbury and Greenham whose enterprise, earnings and spending money make this is an attractive area and scarce farmland to be built on here so valuable.

Mr Churchill was speaking a t a time when less than 100% of the population owned their home and a similarly small proportion had the vote. We have inherited a system of land laws which were framed by landowners, many of whom live nowhere near the sites they put forward for housing development. This has given us one of the most dysfunctional housing markets in the developed world. What kind of market is it when there is only one local authority area in England in which a family on average income can afford to buy their home without help from the 'bank of mum and dad'? Where the children of low income working parents living in West Berkshire villages cannot even afford the market rent of homes in the village they grew up in? A market where you have to create a category called "affordable". We don't need to have affordable bread, or affordable milk.

So I was very concerned – no, angry - when I read in the Unilateral Undertaking that the Owner of the Appeal site – not satisfied with having seen an eye-wateringly large uplift in land value (about £5m for agricultural uses to at least £100m) for housing in capital gains from a decision by my Council, plans to carry on making a huge and unfair income from the residents of this development (assuming the Appeal is upheld) by retaining ownership of all the public open space, appointing a Management Company (another profit making body – maybe one created by the Owner) and charging residents an annual fee for maintainence of what they, from my bitter experience elsewhere in Newbury, think is public land that their local council should maintain.

So thank you ma'am for spotting this and agreeing to have it amended – and thank you to all other parties to this Inquiry for not demurring to my request in my rather belated submission on the subject. I do hope you have also understood why I believe this links in with the issue SUDs management. So I repeat my specific proposal for dealing with the issue, because we're not now going to be discussing it in public.

I cannot state categorically that this is the view of either Greenham Parish Council or Newbury Town Council, because the UU was not available in detail in time for the two councils' joint working group to discuss and make recommendations to their Councils before they had to submit our Joint Statement of Case. However I am confident, having seen the response of Newbury Town Council's relevant commitee chairman to my

question on the subject, that this will be supported by them – and by Greenham, in whose area the country park in its entirety and most of the other public open space is.

We'd like to see the Unilateral Undertaking and/or the Planning Conditions amended somehow to ensure that the District Council has first refusal on any transfer of ownership of all public domain land. If they decline to take this up, next in line should be the two local councils.

Newbury Town Council already has the Power of General Competence, which gives it the legal status to do anything that a Legal Person could do – even outside of its administrative area – if it wishes to and can demonstate a benefit to its residents. It already owns the majority of generously provided public open space in the former MOD land which constitutes nearly half of Wash Common Ward, plus Victoria Park, several other parks and almost all playgrounds. It currently employs the same contractor to manage these areas as the District Council uses for its highway land and urban parks.

Newbury Town Council also owns and manages several public buildings besides the Town Hall. Many of them have been transferred from the District Council, such as the cafe in Victoria Park and the public toilets on the Wharf.

Greenham Parish Council successfully bid - under the Right to Buy an Asset of Community Value – for the Grade II Listed Greenham Common Control Tower, which is managed by a wholly owned charitable company we set up 3 years ago. Our parish clerk is based there, together with the control tower manager, who manages a cafe and a museum of the Cold War which doubles as a venue for a variety of functions and numerous organisations.

The point I'm making Ma'am is that our local councils are quite used to managing public domain land and buildings for the benefit of the whole public. We are accountable in perpetuity to the local community, who every four years can boot some or even all of us councillors out. We know best what our residents need from a Local Centre and from public open space, so we also want to be able to bid to own and run the entire set of on-site Community Facilities on this site.

I would urge Owner, developer and the LPA to study the 2020 Use Classes Order, because although any planning application submitted between 1 September 2020 and 30 July 2021 has to frame its documentation around the old Use Classes (A, B & D), by the time we get to a Reserved Matters application it will presumably be the new Classes E & F we are dealing with. Class F2 seems to cover everything needed in the designated Local Centre on this Appeal site but be more focused around community facilities than being commercial.

The NPPF paras 92 & 128; the Sandleford SPD policies F1 (page 55) and P3 (page 45) emphasise the need to involve the community at an early stage in design of development. The SPD also requires the developer to explore opportunities for shared facilities with named local organisations. These are the same organisations – Newbury College, Newbury Rugby Club and Park House School – through whose land I asked for consideration of securing pedestrian public access. Incidentally all these Newbury facilities are at least partly located in Greenham parish.

If this Appeal succeeds, I strongly urge the developer to work with local representatives like myself to build on the initial contacts we've made – but which Mr Jones admits the developer hasn't yet made – to secure access to and through these facilities. The Rugby Club not only has sporting facilities on its land but social ones and it has planning consent for an early years facility on land recently transferred to David Lloyd leisure. The direct route through the rugby club would be so much more pleasant than having to walk or cycle along roads to the Falkland surgery and Monument Place shops.

So please Ma'am, whatever your recommendation to the Secretary of State (which of course might not be accepted) please put a marker down in your report about the importance of careful placing and timing of access points to and from the Appeal site for non-vehicular journeys. The uses and usefulness of a Local Centre on site, which we believe the developer ought to provide oven ready to fit out – not just as a piece of land – is a function of how much use will be made by future residents of existing facilities off site. So isn't it is the direct interest of Bloor Homes to make the most of what is already provided in the neighbourhood, especially within the space bounded by A339, Monks Lane and A343?

As I explained orally yesterday ma'am, I have personal experience of having to help residents of a housing estate in my former Northcroft Ward in Newbury take ownership of their public and communal areas. As it happens, it was a local developer which has since been taken over twice by larger national homebuilders. They sold Northcroft Park Estate – built in the 1970s on previously developed land – to an absentee landowner, which appointed an absentee management company. There was nothing that residents or the local councils could do about that at the time. The Manco failed to maintain the property to the satisfaction of leaseholders, many of whom let the properties to tenants. So many stopped paying for a service that they weren't getting. So began a downward spiral, leading to broken pavement slabs, muddy puddles on grassed areas, abandoned cars, etc. The occupier tenants and some occupier leaseholders understandably came to their elected councillors to seek a solution. We canvassed every home and found one occupier was a solicitor who used the Leasehold Reform Act to organise and win a referendum that allowed to take over management of their areas.

We do not want to have to do this here. Lets begin by giving the councils the land and responsibility that goes with it. We're not going anywhere!

However there is a complicating factor with the situation of this site's developed area being higher than the sensitive ancient woodlands. This means that most if not all the SUDs has to be incorporated in Green Infrastructure – mostly in public open space. That is why we also wish to see the Planning Condition 20 reflecting the need for public open space and SUDS to be managed as a single entity. The District Council, as Lead Drainage Authority, seems to us to be the best entity to have that responsibility. They are already responsible for overseeing land drainage across the whole district – including developments as well as countryside.

Ma'am I was surprised at the line of questioning of Mr Jones taken by Mr Karkowski on the importnace of affordable housing. I wasn't here for the previous day when Mr Grigoropoulos was cross-examined but I'm sure he was misunderstood if the impression was given that the District Council doesn't agree with Mr Jones that West Berkshire and especially Newbury needs all the affordable housing it can get. Mr Jones is correct to point out that we get most of those affordable homes from large housing

developments, not small ones. But the families who most need social and affordable homes are the same families who most need to avoid paying for their own car, who need to have essential facilities including places of employment within walking, cycling or bus travel distance.

It is all very well quoting straight line distances from Monks Lane to the railway station in order to claim this site can enable those families to manage without using a car for essential journeys. But unless those journeys are pleasant, safe and comfortable, cars will be bought and will be used. The evidence I put before the Inquiry from the Foundation for Integrated Transport shows that developments like this one do not result in sustainable travel. They are as car dependent as those built in the 60s and 70s when planners thought cycling was history!

So the local councils remain unconvinced that the modal shift claims of the developer, which the LPA now accepts, will be achieved. That's largely why we continue to oppose this site being used for as many as 1000 new car-dependent households. I do accept that with more work on detailed junction designs and with a good travel plan managed directly by the District Council we could be proved wrong. I also note that the application is for "up to 1000" dwellings.

Personally I've never said that the Sandleford Park site – CS3 in the Local Plan – can't provide any new homes. Several hundred well designed, carbon neutral homes would be perfectly acceptable and would not over-burden the road network. But of course we don't know what the commercial Agreement between Sandleford Partnership and Bloor Homes says and I fear that any significant reduction in numbers of dwellings would lead to a claim by Bloor that affordable housing was no longer viable here.

I'm grateful to you Ma'am for reminding the main parties of my suggested additional Planning Conditions yesterday. Para 7 of Appendix 6 to my proof of evidence deals with active travel routes between the appeal site and nearby facilities – the point I mentioned just now. Para 9 deals with the existing public footpath: it seeks assurance that the developer will only close that recreational route if and when it really is necessary and will provide a suitable alternative in that event. On the two most recent major housing developments in the District, developers have closed well used public rights of way for

long periods with no alternative route offered. Para 8 suggests that a temporary car park may be needed for visitors to the first phase of country park, so as to avoid the nuisance to occupants of the first phase of dwellings of having dog-walkers park in their residential streets.

If this development does achieve consent, it will be at least 10 years before it is built out. Condition 7 indicates that it could be 10 years before the last Reserved Matters application needs to be submitted. My guess is that Sandleford Park as a whole could still be a major construction site in 20 years. The homes still being built then will need to last at least 100 years – which is less time than my 1890 house in Newbury has been occupied.

With the national target for achieving carbon neutrality only 30 years away and the local one less than 10 years away, it seems absurd that we are allowed – even required - to accept a development now with such poor standards of home insulation when we know the technology is there which can achieve zero carbon. With the economies of scale that major home builders like Bloor could achieve – and just six national home builders account for 80% of all homes being built today – the solution is in their hands, if only they would break out from their cosy short-term cartel building to maximise their profits today and ignoring the cost in use to occupiers of poorly insulated homes, let alone the cost to society and the Planet.

The local architect and builder who built my edge of town centre house on what was in 1890 still a green “West Fields” didn’t have an understanding of the dire prospects for human life on the Planet that we all have now. It may be that you cannot find justification to give sufficient weight to the importance of renewable energy to recommend dismisal of this Appeal. But I draw your attention to NPPF 131 which says “great weight” should be given to “outstanding or innovative” designs which can achieve “high levels of sustainability”, so cannot you give little weight to proposals are not at all innovative and fail to achieve high levels of sustainability.

Also NPPF 153 says that “in determining applications” decision makers should “expect new development to take account of landform, layout, building orientation, massing and landscaping to minimise energy consumption”. Does the proposal before you do that?

My colleague Cllr Abbs thinks not and seemed to have parsuasive evidence when he came came before us. If you agree with him, would it not suggest that the developer needs to go back to the drawing board and re-design the layout in accordance with the 2019 NPPF, which is more up-to-date than the somewhat prescriptive 2015 SPD – especailly when 2012 Core Strategy policy CS15 was found sound by a fellow Inspector nearly 10 years ago and says that dwellings built from 2016 in West Berkshire should be carbon neutral? A new layout might lead to lower numbers of dwellings, a different internal road layout – an entirely disfferent proposal.

In conclusion, as representives of both existing and future residents of Greenham and Newbury and especially of future occupiers of any new homes on the Appeal site, local councillors – unlike developers – are here for the long term and will continue to be rightly regarded as accountable for what is allowed to happen here. We genuinely believe that this Appeal should be dismissed because the proposal is unfit for a future in which life styles and society generally must adapt to the Climate Emergency. These proposals will destroy a beautiful part of West Berkshire and won't contribute at all to tackling climate change. The homes are not needed urgently enough to allow anything less than carbon neutral for a scheme that has to last at least a century.

Although I have spent a lot of time – as we all have – in this Inquiry talking about how we might make the proposals less unacceptable and local people might think I'm now not with Mr Norman and the Say No To Sandleford campaign, I'm afraid I can't accept that the scheme as it stands is anything but a disaster. We need to have it determined under the emerging new Local Plan Ma'am, so please recommend dismissal of the Appeal.