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Dear Councillor Huntingdon-Thresher,

I am writing to you after hearing of some worrying proposals to build private houses within the confines of High Elms Country Park. I understand that you have received representations from local interests stating their opposition to such plans and giving some reasons. Please let me add some more from my slightly different perspective.

High Elms is my old family home; I was brought up there and my family have been continuously resided within the Orpington constituency since 1808. So you will understand that I have some strong personal reasons as well as some more logical arguments for wishing to preserve the existing structures.

To begin with let me summarize what I think is the situation from the documents I have read and the parts of them that concern me personally. As I understand it, quite reasonably in these straightened financial times, you are looking at depot provision within Bromley with a view to making some savings. You have had a report commissioned which looks at all your sites and selects some for selling off, possibly driven by the price you think you can get for them (as you seem to have costed out the returns on each). Of 19 sites identified, you have selected 10 for further consideration. Two of the 10 lie within High Elms boundaries Den Barn and the Stables block, which is referred to as The Lodge (that name should more properly be applied to The gatehouse (known as Flint Lodge). The proposals suggest that the both these sites might be developed into private residential homes. I hope I have got my facts right and perhaps you will correct me if I have anything wrong.

The minutes from a "Commissioning Programme" meeting you held on 12 Sep 2018 indicate that you are the person to write to with concerns about what you propose.

I have an interest in the Priory depot as that is where you keep many of my (Lubbock) family artefacts and paintings, so I was quite pleased to see that was not on the hit list of 10. If it had been I would have been worried about what you were going to do with the contents.

I don't know where you are with the process in general, or if a more public consultation is planned at some point, but can I request that I be kept in the loop as far as any new developments at High Elms are concerned please?

My objections to the proposals are on a number of grounds which I set out below. The points apply mostly to the Stable block but some can also be said about Den Barn. I hope that these would be taken into account before the Council decides on what to do.

- 1) I am not sure if Councillors recognize the full historic significance of the Stables site. The buildings were put up in the early 19th century. They housed the stables for the big house at High Elms and would have been the start and end point of journeys from High Elms until the advent of the car. John Lubbock would have set out to visit Darwin from there and he in turn would have left their carriage there when the Darwin family visited High Elms. In addition, there is under the northern stable the remains of the early nineteenth century wine cellar which would have provided for the big house on the hill. At that time one of the family businesses was importing wine from Europe.
- 2) In 1938 my great grandmother, Alice, Lady Avebury, sold the land to Orpington Urban District Council. Part of that sale included an undertaking by that body to keep the land open for public recreation and not to develop on any part of the land constituting what has become the Country Park. After the second world war, the area

became part of the Green Belt as this was considered to afford the same protections. For the past 80 years, this commitment has been honoured and the buildings within the estate have not changed their fundamental usage. There have been residents within the boundaries, but these have occupied what were former servants homes so the use remained unchanged. Indeed, part of the stables block itself became home to a family, the father of which used to act as caretaker for the main house, until it burned down in 1967.

- 3) A number of structures around the estate have now been listed indicating their importance to posterity. The Eton Fives court for example which backs onto the stables is one such. It has always surprised me why the stables themselves are not among this number. I feel that if English Heritage were to consider the buildings and were told of their history they would apply listing to the stables as well. The wine cellar, which you can still see the top poking through some undergrowth might become the subject of some future archaeology.
- 4) The stables are the largest of the nineteenth century buildings left on the High Elms site. As such they provide visiting members of the public with a glimpse of what the estate used to be like. I always thought it was a pity that Bromley flattened the big house when it burned down as the ruins, once made safe, could have been the prime feature of the park, but it was not to be. It would be a great shame if one of the main draws to the sites of interest on the estate is lost to public gaze. I know they don't have access, but they can look in at the gates and see the general layout and external architecture.
- 5) In past times L.B. Bromley themselves have recognized the value of the site. In 2000, they decided that a blue plaque to honour John Lubbock, the 1st Lord Avebury would be mounted on the wall of the stables. This was chosen because it was felt that there was the most looked at part of the estate and therefore the best place to put this kind of memorial. In addition, I was part of the process not too many years ago to bid for World Heritage site (WHS) status for what was christened "Darwin's landscape laboratory". This included the majority of the High Elms Country Park within its proposed boundaries. During that activity, many officers of the Council told me that they considered the stables to be a vital part of the story to be told about the area. In fact, when the judges visited High Elms, I was able to tell them about the part the stables played within the WHS.
- 6) Simply looking at a map will show that the site is absolutely central to the estate. If you put private housing there you will be setting a dangerous precedent. Why should other developers not be allowed to chip away at even the edges of the park thereby eroding its attraction and integrity each time? At present, the case is easy to argue with my points and those others have put to you, but if you allow this to take place, it will become more difficult to defend.
- 7) Finally, consider what may happen if you allow these residences to be built. Private residents will expect certain things for their homes. I can foresee problems in a number of respects.
 - a. Certain utilities will require connection and maintenance. This might mean more excavations than the site is used to. These will have to avoid damage to the surroundings like the fives court or the kitchen garden wall.
 - b. Residents are bound to want to drive. At present pedestrians are used to wandering across the drive with only the odd council vehicle to worry about. Will the increase in traffic create a hazard strip across the park that children, in particular, will have to be wary of?
 - c. High Elms is famous for its trees. There are a number of big ones near the stable site. Resident complaints about roots or falling leaves are not uncommon. Would this result in any threat to these trees is there are complaints by the occupants?
 - d. Walkers are often curious about the stables. When the gates are open I quite often see them strolling in to look around. Any homes that might be built may feel the need for high fences and/or controlled gates thereby creating an ugly barrier to the public who will wonder why such a feature has been allowed within the park.

These are the seven main reasons I have for objecting to the proposals you have before you. In my view they are stronger than the various reasons you pick for not developing the depots you wish to keep.

As an aside, if Bromley feel that management of High Elms is an expensive enterprise they are unable to maintain, have they ever considered offering the park to the National Trust?

I will send copies of this letter to the leader of the Council and to our MP, Jo Johnson, asking if they have any views on the matter.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Lyulph Avebury

To Councillor William Huntingdon-Thresher

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