

## WITNESS STATEMENT – STEWART ALMOND

### THE METROPOLITAN BOROUGH OF SOLIHULL (SHIRLEY TOWN CENTRE REDEVELOPMENT) COMPULSORY PURCHASE ORDER 2007 AND RELATED ORDERS UNDER S247 AND S257 OF THE TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990

1. My name is Stewart Almond. I live at 53 Haslucks Green Road, Shirley, Solihull, B90 2ED. I am aged 53.
2. I served in the Armed Forces from 1970 to 1995. In 1995 I joined the Shirley British Legion Club and in March 2000 I became Chairman.
3. Our Club is a thriving one. We have over 1,000 members. About half the membership has served in the Armed Forces. This year we are celebrating our 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.
4. We are open Mondays to Thursdays from noon to 3.00 p.m. and in the evenings. Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays we are open all day. Many of our members come into the Club before or after shopping for a drink and a snack.
5. We have land at the back of our premises. It has always been our intention to enlarge the Concert Hall at the rear of our premises. The Hall is much used. Owing to Fire Regulations we are not allowed to have functions for more than 150 people in the Hall in its present size. Our weekly Saturday night dances are always fully booked. All our Friday evenings in the Concert Hall are booked from now until October with various functions.
6. As well as the present Concert Hall not being large enough, we have inadequate storage space so that our tables and chairs are stored in a mobile container on the land behind our building. On most Saturday mornings the Hall is used by charities for money-raising activities. For some time we have been discussing plans to extend our Concert Hall. It has been necessary to put these on hold for several years while the Council has been considering its scheme for the redevelopment of the Shirley Town Centre.
7. A number of British Legion branches in and close to the south of Birmingham have closed. The nearest branches to us are Olton, a very small branch, and at Kings Norton.

Our club is an important community asset for both residents in the immediate vicinity and further afield.

8. A large proportion of our members are elderly. The present site is in an ideal location, close to the Stratford Road and to bus stops. It is also accessible to *Ring and Ride* services. There is plentiful free parking on the adjacent land belonging to the Council. I do not think it would be possible to find an alternative site even half as good located close to the town centre and good public transport services.
9. When the Council first came to see us in 1999 to discuss proposals for redevelopment attempts were made to find an alternative site for us. We were, first of all, offered former educational premises behind the Powergen Building which is located on the northern corner of Haslucks Green Road and Stratford Road. We said that this would not be suitable because the Club is at the heart of the community. The site offered would have been too far from the shopping centre.
10. Subsequently, we were offered a site on the southern side of Haslucks Greek Road close to the proposed entrance to the main car park. This site would have been possible and detailed negotiations took place, including design work. Eventually the Developer advised that it would be too expensive to undertake. The scheme has now been redesigned with the Club remaining in its present position. This seems only sensible in view of the impossibility of finding another centrally located site for us.
11. Soon after I became Chairman Councillor Les Kyles came to address a meeting of the Club. About 500 members were present. At that time he was the Cabinet Member for Development in the Solihull Council. Sadly he has since died. He assured us that the Council would never seek to take our site compulsorily. We were therefore disappointed and shocked to find that the whole of our premises are included in the Compulsory Purchase Order.
12. It is true that on page 12 of the Statement of Case prepared by the Council it is stated our Club will remain and be part of the redevelopment and on page 55 that the Club will form part of the redevelopment. I would have expected therefore that the Council would have already asked the Inspector to recommend that at least the site of our building should be excluded from the Order but I have seen nothing so far to this effect.

13. The Club is not against retail redevelopment on the Stratford Road frontage. Indeed we support such redevelopment. The land at the rear of our premises, which the Council wishes to acquire, is not required for the retail redevelopment. It is to be taken for new residential apartments. I am worried about the proximity of these apartments to our building, bearing in mind our functions, at many of which Big Bands play.
  
14. We would not want to find residents moving into these apartments and then complaining about noisy parties. The Council could not ignore noise complaints and might have to take action under Environmental Health legislation to restrict our functions. That would be a disaster for the Club and a disappointment to the many members of the community who enjoy these functions.
  
15. The Club would respectfully ask the Inspector to recommend that our premises be entirely taken out of the Order unless agreement can be reached
  - 1) as to extending them,
  - 2) as to continuing to provide satisfactory parking arrangements on adjoining land and
  - 3) as to avoiding any conflict between our existing uses and proposed residential uses nearby.