

**Minutes of a meeting of the Ashwell Parish Council Planning Committee held on Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2019 at 7.15pm**

**Present:** Councillors Mark White (Chairman), Graham Lee, Madeleine Legg, Bridget Macey, David Short, David Sims. The Clerk (Jane Porter) was also in attendance.

*See individual items for members of the public.*

**Part A**

1. Apologies: Cllrs Martin Hoffman (other commitment).
2. Minutes of the meeting 10<sup>th</sup> March 2019. These were approved and signed.
3. Declarations of interest. None. Cllr David Short reported that the agricultural tenancy that he had previously held for the site was no longer extant.

**Part B**

**On site considerations and proposals for recommendations to the NHDC Planning Officer**

**Item 12**

NHDC Case Ref. 19/00455/FP. Land at the junction of Ashwell Street and Station Road

Full Planning Permission: Erection of 9 (6 No. Three Bedroom, 3 No. Four bedroom) dwellings with associated parking, amenity space and associated ancillary works, following demolition of existing redundant structures. Creation of new access from Station Road.

Members of the public present: Eleven local residents. The applicant had sent his apologies.

It was noted that a previous application for this site had been withdrawn by the applicant; the Parish Council had sent objections to it. This application was essentially the same with only minor amendments, however required documents covering ecology, archaeology, and drainage were now included.

The following objections made to the previous application were noted and reiterated;

- Settlement boundary changes. The Parish Council had objected direct to NHDC, in consultations, and at the Examination in Public to the Inspector, to the changes to the boundary drawn by NHDC in the new Local Plan. These changes had resulted in this site being included inside the line where there would be a 'presumption in favour of development'.
- Agricultural use. The NHDC pre-application advice had stated, 'The site appears to be a garden area...'. This was incorrect. Cllr David Short reported that he had held an agricultural tenancy with the owner of Townsend Field, the resident of Townsend House Mr Chris Outram, since 2015 and prior to that with the previous owner of the field. He used the field and the buildings on the site to keep his flock of rare breed sheep. The form that the applicant had submitted to NHDC was also incorrect; his name was not listed as an agricultural tenant of the site.  
*See declarations of interest above.*
- Neighbourhood Plan. This was now at a stage when the planning authority should give it weight as emerging policy. It was not supportive of development in this location. Surveys of parishioners had identified the housing needs of the village to be for smaller homes designed for the elderly and those with mobility issues; this application did not meet this need. To safeguard the policy for smaller dwellings permitted development rights should be withdrawn.
- Conservation Area. The prevailing design in this part of the village was of the Arts & Crafts style of the 1920's and echoed the strong influences of Letchworth Garden City. This had been a factor in a recent planning decision by NHDC further along Station Road. The applicant's proposals were an 'off the shelf' style that did not reflect local design.
- Highway safety. It was noted that for some years the Parish Council had been petitioning Herts Highways for safety improvements in Station Road. Of particular concern was the lack of adequate

footways and crossing points for pedestrians. Additions were essential to ensure safe access to the centre of the village (recreation ground, shops and services) in one direction and the sports facilities and allotments at Small Gains in the other.

- No clear justification for the development had been put by the applicant nor any demonstration of how it would be sustainable. There were existing concerns over the capacity of the school, doctor's surgery, water and sewage supplies; additional housing would exacerbate these

In addition to the above points the following views were expressed;

- Housing need/Neighbourhood Plan.

Cllr David Short reported that the proposals did not meet the housing needs of the village as established by Neighbourhood Plan surveys. The need was for smaller units and units suitable for the elderly and/or those with mobility issues. He noted that the Office for National Statistics (ONS) report of September 2018 had established that by 2041 over 85% of the national housing need would be for over 65's. Ashwell was typical in its requirement for a high level of properties suitable for independent living by older people. He also questioned the soundness of the draft Local Plan re its requirement for 14,000 new housing units when the new national figure was just under 10,000; the NHDC figures should be reworked.

- Settlement boundary.

The application site was outside the current boundary. The draft Local Plan that proposed changes to the boundary that would incorporate this field, and others along Ashwell Street, had not yet been passed by the Inspector. The Parish Council, and others, maintained their objection to the boundary changes and the loss of green open space.

- Highway safety. The 20mph zone to be implemented shortly would cover the core of the village but Station Road did not meet the criteria for inclusion. Any proposals for further development should address this issue.

- Sustainability issues.

Additional strain on water and sewerage had not been adequately addressed. HCC had recently cited the lack of places at the school as a reason for objecting to an application appeal for the 'Land off Station Road'. Statements re transport links were misleading; bus services to local towns and the station were limited.

- Environmental issues.

It was believed that bats roosted in the old pig units. There was asbestos in these buildings that would have to be dealt with correctly.

It was **resolved** that a recommendation be made to the NHDC Planning Officer that permission be refused on the grounds of the objections stated (vote unanimous).