

**Minutes of the Ashwell Parish Council meeting held on
Wednesday 7th September 2016 in the Parish Room**

Present: Councillors Mark White (Chairman), Martin Hoffman (Vice-chairman), Graham Lee, Madeleine Legg, Bridget Macey, David Short, David Sims.

The Clerk was also in attendance.

Members of the public: Five parishioners and County Councillor Tony Hunter.

49. Apologies for absence None.

50. Minutes of previous Council meeting 3rd August 2016

1. It was *resolved* that these be approved and signed.

It was noted that the draft minutes of the Joint Management and Finance Committee held on 17th August 2016 were available.

51. Matters of general report from previous meetings

51.1 (August Council, 41.1) 1st Ashwell Scout Group fundraising for a Public Access Defibrillator (PAD). The Chairman reported that the Parish Council was now the owner of the old red telephone box in the High Street. The Scouts were arranging to have the old telephone apparatus removed and would then clean and tidy the whole unit. They were also to install signage. The Parish Council's handyman would repaint it; the Scouts had arranged for the correct colour of red paint to be supplied. The PAD would then be installed.

51.2 (August Council, 41.2) Superfast broadband. The Chairman reported that whilst works had taken place at various locations around the village there was still no confirmation of when it would be up and running.

52. Parish management reports (current responsibilities shown in brackets)

(Routine matters concerning the management of parish assets and amenities are usually not discussed or reported to full council meetings; some are dealt with by the Management Committee, others directly by parish councillors and/or the Clerk)

(Draft minutes of Joint Management and Finance Committee, 17th August 2016, available)

52.1 Cemetery (Cllr Madeleine Legg)

Cllr Madeleine Legg reported that (i) the Chapel of Rest tenancy was in the hands of the solicitor. (ii) Tree works on the eastern boundary were pending TCA (Trees in Conservation Area) permission from NHDC, expected mid-October.

52.2 Recreation Ground and Pavilion (Cllrs Mark White and Madeleine Legg)

Cllr Madeleine Legg reported: (i) A User Group meeting was to be scheduled now that the holiday period was over. (ii) Clarification from the User Group would be sought re the new storage container. (iii) New signage at the entrances was pending.

See also 55.1 below re project funding proposals.

52.3 Playground (Cllr Madeleine Legg)

Cllr Madeleine Legg reported that the RoSPA inspection report had been received. No risk items requiring immediate attention had been identified; minor items would be reviewed and the supplier requested to quote for any necessary works.

Clerk

52.4 Public toilets at the pavilion (Cllr Madeleine Legg)

See item 55.1 below re project funding proposals.

52.5 The Springs (Cllr Martin Hoffman)

Cllr Martin Hoffman reported: (i) the Springhead hedge cutting and removal of the dead Ash tree were scheduled for early October. (ii) Repainting of the Herts Highways railings was pending a date from the supplier -see also 53.1 below). (iii) The RoSPA inspection report had been received. No risk items requiring immediate attention had been identified; minor items would be reviewed and the supplier requested to quote for any necessary works.

Clerk

52.6 Small Gains (Allotments, Accies sports field and shared car parking area) (Cllr David Sims)

Cllr David Sims reported that the water supply connections had been upgraded. It was agreed that a letter of thanks be sent to the tenant who had organised this at no cost to the Parish Council.

Clerk

See also item 55.1 below re project funding proposals.

52.7 Miscellaneous amenities

(The Lock Up - Cllr David Short. Merchant Taylors' Green and Carters' Pond - Cllr Martin Hoffman)
Nothing to report.

52.8 Street furniture (Cllr Bridget Macey) Nothing to report.

52.9 St Mary's Churchyard grounds maintenance (Cllr Martin Hoffman)

Cllr Martin Hoffman reported that tree works along the Mill Street boundary were scheduled for October.

52.10 Parish Clock (Cllr Mark White) The Chairman reported that, following concerns that wear and tear was affecting the chimes, he had requested a full report and indicative costings from the preferred supplier. This would be discussed at the Finance Committee when proposals for the 2017-18 budget were collated.

52.11 War Memorial Nothing to report.

53. Items re other authorities/organisations

Standing Orders suspended for this item; taken at 8.00pm

53.1 Herts Highways

It was noted that County Councillor Tony Hunter had been invited to attend to provide updates on various matters that had been requested by the Parish Council. It was noted that funding for some of these could be allocated from his Highways Locality Budget (HLB).

See www.hertsdirect.org/hertfordshire/CouncillorLocalityBudgets (County Councillor Tony Hunter)

Cllr Hunter reported:

- (i) Woodforde Close grounds maintenance. Following concerns from a parishioner he had determined that the contract, and hence the specification, was for verges rather than an amenity area. This was now to be changed; the contractor would be John O'Connor and the specification the same as for Angells Meadow.
- (ii) Winter salting. He was aware that the Parish Council had, over a period of some years, requested changes to the salting routes and additional salt bins. He had met with the officer concerned and determined that bulk salt was available to parishes for community use. This would be supplied on a pallet with 36 x 25kg bags and thus required sufficient storage space and arrangements for local distribution.
- (iii) Weed-killing. Key roads in the village were now on the routine spray list.
- (iv) The Springs/HCC railings re-painting. Funding, originally to come from his 2016-17 budget, had now been identified from elsewhere. Works would now be progressed by the Parish Council's supplier.
- (v) Speed Indicator Devices (SIDs). Surveys had been carried out for x2 bases (Station Road and Newnham Way) with one shared mobile unit. Cllr Martin Hoffman requested further details of procedures for moving the device between bases.
- (vi) Re-surfacing. Station Road at the entrance to Small Gains Lane and Fordham Close were on the schedule.
- (vii) Verge protection bollards outside the Cemetery. Cllr David Sims requested a date for these to be installed.
- (viii) Station Road safety improvements. Cllr David Sims requested an update. The short new section of footway was to be funded from his budget; additional funds were being sought for the longer section. The extension to the footway on the corner with Lucas Lane was still under consideration.
- (ix) A505 Odsey junction. Cllr David Sims requested an update. Works to improve sightlines by removing vegetation were in hand; part of the grass verge was to be tarmacked. Signage improvements were also scheduled and white-lining to be upgraded. A feasibility study had been commissioned to consider more radical improvements such as a roundabout.
- (x) LED street-lighting. This was scheduled to be installed in Ashwell by March 2017. He assured that the swan-neck heritage design in the correct green colour would be retained. He agreed to investigate the proposals for areas such as Woodforde Close and Angells Meadow that had a different design to see if uniformity could be achieved across the whole village.
- (xi) Drainage issues at Plait Hall in the High Street. He had been requested by the residents to investigate problems. It was agreed to forward information on file re previous problems at West End.
- (xii) Yellow lines. It was noted that the Parish Council had forwarded proposals for several locations to be considered. If these were accepted they would be considered for funding from his HLB.
- (xiii) Overgrown verges. It was noted that a list of locations in need of attention had been sent to the officer in charge of the '£3 million Restoration Project'. It had been agreed that Kingsland Way was a priority.
- (xiv) Police Road Safety Fund. Cllr David Sims requested an update. It was unlikely that funds would be available for any of the projects identified.

See 53.3 below re HCC bus services.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Hunter for his attendance.

3.2 Herts Highways/Rights of Way

53.2.1 Reprint of the Ashwell footpath leaflet. It was noted that this was being progressed; funding was to come from P3 (Parish Paths Partnership).

53.3 Herts County Council/Bus services

53.3.1 Bus Services Bill. It was noted that information had been received via a parishioner re the central government proposal to ban local authorities from setting up publicly run bus services.

53.3.2 New timetable from June 2016. Concerns had been received from a parishioner that the changes did not meet the needs of users; she requested the Parish Council's support in reverting to the previous timetable. County Councillor Tony Hunter reported that he was aware of the concerns and that these were being looked into.

53.3.3 Fare increases. Concerns had been received that there had been a fare increase from 1st September and no forward notice of this had been given. County Councillor Tony Hunter reported that he was aware of the concerns and that these were being looked into. An annual 5% increase was part of the contract; fares were still heavily subsidised by the County Council.

53.4 North Herts District Council (see 54 below re planning and the draft Local Plan)

53.4.1 Farr Festival. It was noted that a response had been received from NHDC giving details of the license. District Councillor Janine Paterson had informed that she was pursuing the matter. It was agreed to monitor progress and to take further action if necessary.

53.4.2 Waste/recycling bins stored on the public footway in the High Street. It was noted that complaints had been received from parishioners. NHDC had informed that they did not have a policy of enforcement to ensure that residents stored their bins on their own property. It was agreed that letters be sent from the Parish Council to households where bins were being stored on public land requesting that this practice cease.

Clerk

54. Reports re planning matters

(draft minutes of Planning Committee meetings held on Wednesday 3rd August and Sunday 4th September available)

54.1 Consultations received (from NHDC as Planning Authority to the Parish Council as consultee)

(If any objections are raised either by a parishioner or a parish councillor an on-site meeting of the Planning Committee is convened to consider those items; see notice board or contact Clerk for agenda)

New applications received as of 1st September.

54.1.1 Application considered at a meeting of the Planning Committee on site on Sunday 4th September.

NHDC Case Ref No: 16/01797/1 Land rear of 4-14, Claybush Road.

Full Planning Permission: 33 dwellings together with associated access, parking, amenity and open space. It was noted that the decision of the committee had been to finalise its response at the September Council meeting, '...to ensure that the Parish Council's response to NHDC included all the relevant facts and full details of the supporting evidence from national planning policies and the District Council's own planning policies.'

Cllr Martin Hoffman proposed (seconded by Cllr Madeleine Legg) that a recommendation be made to the NHDC Planning Officer that the application be refused with objections on the following grounds:-

- (i) Ashwell Parish Council has already objected to the inclusion of this site (AS1) in the emerging Local Plan. The emerging Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan, resulting from widespread public consultations and surveys, has been ignored.

Ashwell Parish Council has not objected to the principle of development and has been pro-active, through the Neighbourhood Plan, in identifying what type of development is required to satisfy the housing needs of the village and the sites suitable for it. These would more than adequately satisfy the number of units required.

This is undemocratic and fails to satisfy the requirements for local democracy (Localism Act 2011).

- (ii) Current Planning Policy: This is a hostile application; the Claybush Hill site is outside the existing policy boundary. (District Local Plan 2. Saved Policies 6 and 7)

- (iii) Landscape and Heritage: This application fails to comply with National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and NHDC's own local planning policy, both current and emerging, to protect valued landscapes and heritage.

The site falls within the North Baldock Chalk Uplands Character Area designated by NHDC for its landscape value, '... considered to be of moderate to high sensitivity. Open views and skylines throughout the Character Area are particularly sensitive to development.'

Supporting evidence for NHDC Policy HE1: Heritage Strategy states '...development of any scale within the site is likely to impact upon views north towards Ashwell Church Tower from Claybush Hill across the site'. Any development would adversely affect the setting of Arbury Banks, a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

NHDC has refused three previous applications on this site for these reasons. The NHDC refusal was upheld by the Planning Inspectorate on the same grounds following appeal by the applicant.

- (iv) Highway Safety: This application fails to comply with both National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and NHDC's own current and emerging planning policy for Highway safety including the specific conditions for access to site AS1 in the draft Local Plan 2011-31.

The existing footpath network extending to the junction of Bear Lane and Ashwell Street includes x19 steps and thus fails to meet national and local planning policy 57. There is no land available to overcome this problem. The requirement for adequate pedestrian access to and from the site itself is also unachievable. The proposed route is along a private, un-adopted, unmade, single track road opening onto a complex junction with no pavement provision. Council waste/recycling vehicles servicing this limb of Ashwell Street have to reverse along the road and across the junction. Access to the centre of the village is via a shared road surface with significant traffic flows and a steep gradient that is particularly hazardous in icy conditions. The proposed development of the adjacent brownfield site (Cooke Engineering) for additional housing will exacerbate these concerns.

Full supporting evidence for each of the objections would be supplied. The letter to the Planning Officer would also include points that the Parish Council wished to be taken into consideration (See the attached Appendix 3 for the letter to the Planning Officer).

It was **resolved** (unanimous) that the proposal be accepted.

Clerk

54.1.2 To consider the following application.

Case Ref No: 16/01949/1LB 16 High Street

Listed Building Consent: Proposed pargetting to the upper south elevation gable end.

Some parish councillors expressed their concerns that (i) the works had now been carried out, ie this was a retrospective application, (ii) the symbol of an Ash tree rather than an Oak would be more appropriate for Ashwell.

It was **resolved** to recommend to the Conservation Officer that the application be accepted.

Clerk

54.1.3 Works to Trees in Conservation Area (TCA) applications to NHDC.

The following was noted:

NHDC Case Ref No: 16/02149/1TCA Ashwell Cemetery

Works to Trees in a Conservation Area: Reduce 14 Holm oaks (T676 to T689 on plan) by 30%.

54.1.4. To agree a date for a Planning Committee meeting to consider the following:

NHDC Case Ref No: 16/02154/1 J Cooke Engineering, Ashwell Street

Full Planning Permission: Erection of 6 x 4 bedroom dwellings and 1 x 3 bedroom dwelling with detached double garage; associated car parking and ancillary works following the demolition of existing factory building.

It was agreed that a site meeting of the Planning Committee would be scheduled for Sunday 2nd October at 9.00am. The formal decision on the application would be made at the October Council meeting the following Wednesday, 5th October.

54.2 (August Council, 44.1.4.1) Tree Protection Orders (TPO). It was noted that the Senior Planning Officer had responded with information as to the requirements for requesting a TPO. A key criterion was that the tree(s) must be under threat. It was agreed that further advice be taken.

Clerk

54.3 To note any decisions on planning applications made by NHDC as Planning Authority.

None to report.

54.4 District Local Plan 2011-31

54.4.1 (August Council. 44.4.1) NHDC decision, at their meeting 20th July 2016, to progress the draft Local Plan 2011-31 without amendment. It was noted that a letter had been sent to Mr David Scholes, CEO, expressing concerns that the decision, (i) failed to consider the responses to local consultation and the emerging Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan, ie it was undemocratic, (ii) failed to comply with planning policy; National Planning Policy Framework, current and emerging NHDC policies, (iii) as such was likely to be rejected by the Government Inspector.

Parish councillors expressed their concerns at comments understood to have been made by individual planning officers in relation to the importance they placed on the draft Local Plan when considering current planning applications. It was alleged that very little value was placed on emerging Neighbourhood Plans.

55. Reports re Finance matters

55.1 (August Council, 13.1) Section 106 claims and grant proposals to NHDC. Cllr Madeleine Legg reported on further correspondence. Site visits by the NHDC Community Development Manager, Stuart Izzard, to the Pavilion and Small Gains had included herself, Cllr Martin Hoffman and Cllr David Sims.

It was hoped that funding for the toilets upgrade project and Small Gains development would be released through section 106. Funding from a new NHDC capital fund had been proposed for the pavilion upgrade.

Local supplier Bob Swain had been briefed to supply outline plans with indicative costings for the toilets and pavilion projects by the end of the month. Discussions with the User Group and the involvement of the Cricket Club in making the capital fund application would be progressed.

55.2 Audit 2015-16.

55.2.1 It was noted that the Annual Return had now been signed off by the External Auditor; there were no matters arising.

55.2.3 The formal public notice period and the requirement for publication of the audited accounts by 30th September were noted.

55.3 Insurance. It was noted that the schedule was being reviewed prior to the renewal date of 30th September.

Clerk/MNW

55.4 Proposal for approval of monthly Accounts and Bills for Payment.

It was *resolved* that these be approved and paid (see Appendix 2).

Clerk

56. To receive any reports from working groups

56.1 Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan Group (leader Cllr David Short) (see also 54.4 above) Cllr David Short reported that the group was progressing the various sections with a deadline for completion of June 2017.

56.2 Website Group (leader Cllr Graham Lee) Cllr Graham Lee reported that the supplier who had been briefed by the previous Parish Council for the new site was now winding down her business; alternatives were being investigated.

57. PARISH AFFAIRS, REPORTS FROM OTHER BODIES AND OPEN FORUM

Standing Orders suspended for this item; taken at 8.30pm

57.1 School Governing Body. Cllr David Short (a school governor in his own right) reported that the new MUGA (Multi Use Games Area) had been installed on the site of the old swimming pool. This had significantly increased the area for all-weather play. The new PAN (Published Access Number) was now effective for the first two year groups and would subsequently apply to all classes.

57.2 Museum. Cllr Martin Hoffman (Chairman of the trustees in his own right) reported that problems with damp had been identified and would need to be addressed.

57.3 At Home. Cllr David Short reported that proposals to celebrate the 1100th anniversary of Ashwell were being progressed.

57.4 Support for Ashwell retailers/local businesses. Cllr Graham Lee reported on the meeting held on Monday 5th September to which local businesses and retailers had been invited. Five representatives had attended with a couple of apologies received. Some clear aspects to consider had emerged. He would issue notes of the meeting.

GEL

57.5 Items raised by parishioners.

One parishioner requested information on the Parish Clock - see 52.10 above.

Meeting closed at 10.00pm

Forthcoming meetings:

Next monthly Council meeting Wednesday 5th October 2016, 8pm in the Parish Room.

Planning Committee meeting Sunday 2nd October, 9am. See item 54.1.4 above.

Appendix 1 – General material received

Items routinely forwarded to parish councillors by email

- North Herts District Council -weekly 'Members Information'
- HAPTC -Briefings and Bulletins.
- SLCC -updates and newsletters.
- Police OWL/Rural News/Neighbourhood Watch bulletins.

Appendix 2

ACCOUNTS AND BILLS FOR PAYMENT -September 2016			7th September 2016			
			Declarations: None			
Proposed (i) Cllr Legg (ii) Cllr Short						
			£	£	£	
			Precept	Grants	Other	
			Total			
Receipts						
38	Neville Funeral Service	chapel rent			68.75	68.75
39	Santander	bank interest			7.85	7.85
40	Rhubarb & Mustard	yearbook sales			20.00	20.00
Total				0.00	96.60	96.60
			Admin, office costs & Other Misc	Management of Parish Assets & Amenities	VAT	Total
Payments						
By Direct Debit						
106	NHDC (01/08/2016)	trade refuse bin (Alms Lane)		97.37		97.37
107	E.ON (01/09/16)	chapel electricity		11.00		11.00
108	BT (18/08/2016)	office phone and broadband		163.71	32.74	196.45
109	Affinity Water (01/09/16)	cemetery water		20.46		20.46
110	E.ON (29/08/16)	toilets electricity		8.06	0.40	8.46
111	E.ON (29/08/16)	pavilion electricity		16.13	0.81	16.94
By Cheque						
112	J C M Porter	Clerk's salary	1,097.99			1,097.99
113	J C M Porter	reimbursement office expenses	112.97		22.52	135.49
114	HCC Pensions-LGPS Account	clerk's pension	402.70			402.70
115	M Barden	Environmental Cleansing		178.43		178.43
116	M Chandler	Duties at Pavilion and Rec		73.20		73.20
117	Post Office	tax&NI to Inland Revenue	230.00	139.60		369.60
118	K Clifford	Premises duties		30.00		30.00
119	BDO LLP	audit fee 2015-16	300.00		60.00	360.00
120	D J Granger Grounds Maint. Lt	grounds maintenance worksheet 14		306.00	61.20	367.20
121	The CGM Group (East Anglia)	pitch mowing at the rec 02 and 16/08/16		58.14	11.63	69.77
122	D J Granger Grounds Maint. Lt	grounds maintenance worksheet 15		366.00	73.20	439.20
123	The Liberty Co Ltd	toilets cleaning (01/08-28/08)		128.00	25.60	153.60
Total			2143.66	1596.10	288.10	4,027.86
Outstanding Accounts						
Yearbook 2016 adverts (x1)					65.00	
Total						65.00
Money at bank						
Current Account			07/09/2016		34,119.99	
Deposit Account			01 September 2016		30,422.86	
Total						64,542.85
Cheques banked after/BACS transfers after						-
Cheques drawn but not cleared/DD's outstanding						110.99
Total						64,431.86
Total after paying this months cheques						60,404.00
Total in current a/c after paying this months cheques						29,981.14

Appendix 3 -Letter to the NHDC Planning Officer

Ms Anne McDonald
Planning and Environment
North Herts District Council
Gernon Road
Letchworth SG6 3JF

8th September 2016

Dear Ms McDonald

Re NHDC Case Ref No: 16/01797/1 Land rear of 4-14, Claybush Road.

Full Planning Permission: 33 dwellings together with associated access, parking, amenity and open space

At its recent meeting Ashwell Parish Council resolved (unanimous) to recommend to the NHDC Planning Officer that the application be **REFUSED** with objections on the following grounds:-

Ashwell Parish Council has already objected to the inclusion of this site (AS1) in the emerging Local Plan. The emerging Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan, resulting from widespread public consultations and surveys, has been ignored.

Ashwell Parish Council has not objected to the principle of development and has been pro-active, through the Neighbourhood Plan, in identifying what type of development is required to satisfy the housing needs of the village and the sites suitable for it. These would more than adequately satisfy the number of units required.

This is undemocratic and fails to satisfy the requirements for local democracy (Localism Act 2011).

Supporting evidence for this includes:

A. Preferred Options Consultation November 2014. (i) Letter from Ashwell Parish Council to NHDC setting out its reasons for rejecting the Claybush Hill site. (ii) A total of 135 relevant and specific objections, 92% from residents of Ashwell. Just one letter in support. This from a community of 800+ households.

B. Neighbourhood Plan. (i) Emerging plan has included parish-wide surveys and the preparation of a draft plan during the last 2 years. (ii) Meetings with an NHDC Senior Planning Officer who has advised and guided the group. (iii) December 2015 details of three alternative sites provided to NHDC that would meet the housing needs identified that cannot be catered for by AS1. (iv) The draft emerging Neighbourhood Plan issued to NHDC May 2016, ie within the timetable given for registering alternative options for consideration for the NHDC draft Local Plan.

C. NHDC Council meeting 20th July 2016/Draft Local Plan. (i) Letter from Ashwell Parish Council, in advance of the meeting, to all NHDC members reiterating the reasons for rejecting the Claybush Hill site. (ii) Presentation to the meeting by a representative of the Parish Council and the Neighbourhood Plan working group reiterating the reasons for rejecting the Claybush Hill site. (iii) Letter to David Scholes, CEO NHDC, following the meeting expressing concerns at the undemocratic decision to progress the draft Local Plan despite a plethora of consultee objections and reiterating the reasons for the objections.

Current Planning Policy: This is a hostile application; the Claybush Hill site is outside the existing policy boundary.

(District Local Plan 2. Saved Policies 6 and 7)

Landscape and Heritage: This application fails to comply with National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and NHDC's own local planning policy, both current and emerging, to protect valued landscapes and heritage.

The site falls within the North Baldock Chalk Uplands Character Area designated by NHDC for its landscape value, '... considered to be of moderate to high sensitivity. Open views and skylines throughout the Character Area are particularly sensitive to development.'

Supporting evidence for NHDC Policy HE1: Heritage Strategy states ‘...development of any scale within the site is likely to impact upon views north towards Ashwell Church Tower from Claybush Hill across the site’. Any development would adversely affect the setting of Arbury Banks, a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

NHDC has refused three previous applications on this site for these reasons. The NHDC refusal was upheld by the Planning Inspectorate on the same grounds following appeal by the applicant.

Supporting evidence for this includes:

A. NPPF 11. Conserving and enhancing the natural environment.

NPPF 12. Conserving and enhancing the historic environment.

B. NHDC current policy and emerging policy/draft Local Plan 2011-31.

Policy NE1: Landscape and Environmental Protection (page 56).

Policy HE1: Heritage Strategy (Page 67)

Design SPD (Page 17).

NHDC Supplementary Planning Guidance No.18 Ashwell Village Design Statement.

NHDC Supporting evidence: Landscape Study (Character, Sensitivity and Capacity) 2011; North Baldock Chalk Uplands/Area 224 (page 146). Heritage Assessment Ashwell, June 2016.

Section 12. Communities/Ashwell

‘1.9 The impact of the proposed site on heritage assets and the landscape is a key consideration’.

Highway Safety: This application fails to comply with both National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and NHDC’s own current and emerging planning policy for Highway safety including the specific conditions for access to site AS1 in the draft Local Plan 2011-31.

The existing footpath network extending to the junction of Bear Lane and Ashwell Street includes x19 steps and thus fails to meet national and local planning policy 57. There is no land available to overcome this problem. The requirement for adequate pedestrian access to and from the site itself is also unachievable. The proposed route is along a private, un-adopted, unmade, single track road opening onto a complex junction with no pavement provision. Council waste/recycling vehicles servicing this limb of Ashwell Street have to reverse along the road and across the junction. Access to the centre of the village is via a shared road surface with significant traffic flows and a steep gradient that is particularly hazardous in icy conditions. The proposed development of the adjacent brownfield site (Cooke Engineering) for additional housing will exacerbate these concerns.

Supporting evidence for this includes:

A. NPPF Section 4. Sustainable development: 32. ‘Safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all people...’

B. NHDC current policy and emerging policy/draft Local Plan 2011-31.

Policy D1: Design and Sustainability (Page 45): 7.11 The policy seeks to ensure that the design and location of new development makes it accessible to all potential users.

Policy 57: ‘...road and footpath layout provides safe and convenient pedestrian routes between homes and local community facilities’.

Section 12. Communities/Ashwell site AS1.

‘1.10 Currently there is no pedestrian access along Claybush Road, therefore the development should deliver a pedestrian access route into the village to enable access to services and facilities.

1.11 The footpath network in Ashwell currently extends to the junction of Bear Lane and Ashwell Street and there may be opportunities to connect from here from the north of the allocated site.’

Ashwell Parish Council would also like you to note the following points:

- Housing supply. The Parish Council is aware that the District Council cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable sites. However, it is of the view that the adverse impacts on the valued landscape and significant heritage setting, and the failure to demonstrate Highway safety, would significantly outweigh the benefits of housing development on the Claybush Hill site. Other sites have been identified in Ashwell to fulfil the housing need.

- Local consultation. A significant number of Ashwell parishioners have responded to consultations and expressed their views at public meetings. Twenty-one people attended the committee site meeting for this application. The Chairman noted that, again, parishioners' objections were not of a 'nimby' nature. Those who had expressed their concerns resided in all parts of the village and not just adjacent to the Claybush Hill site. The surveys undertaken as part of the emerging Neighbourhood Plan had achieved an excellent response and clearly expressed the views of the community.
- Housing needs. The emerging Neighbourhood Plan Housing Survey has identified a lack of provision for the elderly. Prior to the recent NHDC policy changes re access to Wolverley House many Ashwell residents looked forward to being accommodated within this North Herts Homes facility. There is a very severe shortage of suitable private accommodation in the village. Recent developments at Walkdens and Philosophers Gate have addressed some of the need for social/affordable and small family units.
- Inaccuracies in the application. Concerns have been expressed by parishioners and parish councillors that documents supplied by the applicant contained factual inaccuracies and wording carefully chosen in order to support the application. Examples cited have included statements concerning pedestrian access, traffic flows relevant to suburban rather than rural areas, densities for a semi-rural not a rural location.
- Poor design. Parishioners and parish councillors have expressed their concerns that the design of the proposed dwellings was poor and 'not worthy of Ashwell'. It has been noted that some years ago Ashwell was included in a list of the top 100 villages for design; sadly some recent developments had meant that this was no longer the case. It was noted that design guidelines required the density to be reduced towards the outskirts of a settlement; this application did not comply with this. The height of the buildings was also not compliant with good design for a valued landscape on a sloping site overlooking a settlement that included a conservation area and the Grade 1 listed building of St Mary's Church. The proposed screening of the site by tree planting would be only partial and very inadequate for the part of the year when there was no foliage.
- Archaeology. The Claybush Hill site falls within an area designated to be of archaeological significance. Parishioners and parish councillors have expressed their concerns that this has not been adequately considered.
- Infrastructure delivery. Parishioners and parish councillors have expressed their concerns that current inadequacies in infrastructure will not be sufficiently addressed and problems thus exacerbated.
- Planning obligations/section 106. Parishioners and parish councillors have expressed their concerns that the views and needs of the community have been inadequately addressed in previous planning applications. As a matter of procedure Ashwell Parish Council would expect to be included in negotiations to agree these.

Please see also the Appendix of Supporting Evidence.
Please contact me if any clarification is required.

Please can you ensure that the Parish Council is kept informed as to how and when this application will be progressed.

Yours sincerely,



Jane Porter (Mrs), Clerk
Ashwell Parish Council
Cc Janine Paterson, District Councillor

APPENDIX OF SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

1.1 LANDSCAPE

National Planning Policy Framework

<http://planningguidance.communities.gov.uk/blog/policy/achieving-sustainable-development/delivering-sustainable-development/11-conserving-and-enhancing-the-natural-environment/>

NPPF Section 11. Conserving and enhancing the natural environment.

Extract:

‘Protecting and enhancing valued landscapes...’

NHDC draft Local Plan 2011-31

http://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/northherts-cms/files/local_plan_preferred_options_december_2014_0.pdf

Policy NE1: Landscape and Environmental Protection (page 56).

Extracts:

9.5 Government advice set out in the NPPF seeks to conserve the natural environment which contributes to the local distinctiveness of the area. Plans and policies should ensure that new development preserves or enhances historic buildings and landscapes, conservation areas and important archaeological features and their settings.

9.8 The North Herts Landscape Study (Character, Sensitivity & Capacity) assesses the character of the landscape across the district by looking at factors such as the geology, landform, soil types and historical activities for each area. This study provided a description of the characteristics of each landscape character area. It has subsequently been developed to identify the inherent sensitivities of each character area in landscape and visual terms, together with its capacity to accommodate a range of different types of development. Development should respect the sensitivities of each landscape character area and accord with the guidelines identified for each landscape character area in relation to built development and landscape management.

Design SPD (Page 17)

117. The Council’s Landscape Character Assessment provides a very useful tool and will play an important role in providing guidance for the acceptability of proposals.

Evidence base/Background papers -Landscape Study (Character, Sensitivity and Capacity) -2011

<http://www.north-herts.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/local-plan-emerging-policy/evidence-base/north-herts-landscape-study>

North Baldock Chalk Uplands. Area 224. Map (page 146).

Extracts:

(i) Landscape Character sensitivities (page 151), ‘The southern edge of Ashwell is well contained and would be sensitive to further development.’

(ii) Visual sensitivities (page 151), ‘...considered to be of moderate to high sensitivity. Open views and skylines throughout the Character Area are particularly sensitive to development.’

(iii) Capacity to accommodate development/Smaller urban extensions <5ha (page 151a),

‘This type of development would not be appropriate within much of this Character Area, due to its rural character in all areas, except potentially the eastern fringes of Baldock. It would introduce elements that would reduce the openness of the North Baldock Chalk Uplands in all other locations, including the fringes of Ashwell.’

Section 12. Communities/Ashwell

Extracts:

1.9 The impact of the proposed site on heritage assets and the landscape is a key consideration’.

Site History

NHDC has refused all three previous applications on the grounds of adverse impact on the landscape. One of these went to appeal and the Planning Inspector upheld the refusal on the same grounds; ‘...an unsightly incursion into the attractive open land that rises southwards from the village.’

July 1987 – Erection of 4 detached bungalows. Refused by NHDC; applicant appealed to the Planning Inspector but the refusal was upheld. Case Ref 1/1216/86(890) T/APP/XI925/A/87/065956/P3.

Nov 1978 – Case Ref 78/01417/1 Refused by NHDC.

August 1996 – Case Ref 95/00909/1 Refused by NHDC.

1.2 HERITAGE

National Planning Policy Framework

<http://planningguidance.communities.gov.uk/blog/policy/achieving-sustainable-development/delivering-sustainable-development/12-conserving-and-enhancing-the-historic-environment/>

NPPF Section 12. Conserving and enhancing the historic environment.

Extracts:

129. Local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this assessment into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal.

132. When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting.

NHDC draft Local Plan 2011-31

http://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/northherts-cms/files/local_plan_preferred_options_december_2014_0.pdf

Policy HE1: Heritage Strategy (Page 67)

Extract:

10.4 This section of the Local Plan is the Heritage Strategy, setting out the main features of the historic environment in North Hertfordshire. The determination of applications affecting heritage assets, will take place in accordance with the policies of this plan, the NPPF and relevant legislation.

Evidence base/Supporting evidence -Heritage Assessment Ashwell June 2016

<http://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/northherts-cms/files/Heritage%20Assessment%20-%20-%20Ashwell%20-%20June%202016.pdf>

Extract:

'...development of any scale within the site is likely to impact upon views north towards Ashwell Church Tower from Claybush Hill across the site'.

Section 12. Communities/Ashwell

Extracts:

1.9 The impact of the proposed site on heritage assets and the landscape is a key consideration'.

Site History

NHDC has refused all previous applications (1978, 1987, 1996).

July 1987 – Erection of 4 detached bungalows. Case Ref 1/1216/86(890)

On appeal the Planning Inspector upheld the refusal; '...I conclude that the conservation of good quality rural land, and the protection of the setting of an important historic village override the general presumption in favour of allowing proposals for development'. T/APP/XI925/A/87/065956/P3.

1.3 HIGHWAY SAFETY

National Planning Policy Framework

<http://planningguidance.communities.gov.uk/blog/policy/achieving-sustainable-development/delivering-sustainable-development/4-promoting-sustainable-transport/>

NPPF Section 4. Sustainable development.

Extract:

32. 'Safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all people...'

Policy D1: Design and Sustainability (Page 45)

Extract:

7.11 The policy seeks to ensure that the design and location of new development makes it accessible to all potential users.

Policy 57 ('...road and footpath layout provides safe and convenient pedestrian routes between homes and local community facilities')

Section 12. Communities/Ashwell

Extracts:

'1.10 Currently there is no pedestrian access along Claybush Road, therefore the development should deliver a pedestrian access route into the village to enable access to services and facilities.

1.11 The footpath network in Ashwell currently extends to the junction of Bear Lane and Ashwell Street and there may be opportunities to connect from here from the north of the allocated site.'

Recent decisions in Ashwell

NHDC Case Ref 15/00691/: Land rear of 39-59 Station Road.

Appeal against refusal by NHDC/refusal upheld by the Planning Inspectorate February 2016.

From the Planning Inspector's report.

'Highway safety 19; ... the route a pedestrian may take cannot be controlled by planning condition.'

- Relevance to AS1; Concerns exist that the most direct route to and from the school would be via Claybush Road, a shared surface road with a blind corner; no land is available for the provision of a pavement.

'Highway safety 20; Local residents have drawn my attention to the number of cars that park...given the nature of the junction, ..., such a situation would be detrimental to highway safety.'

- Relevance to AS1; Concerns that the proposed pedestrian access is via a complex junction and a single track road where waste/recycling vehicles reverse in order to service this limb of Ashwell Street. The area has an existing off-street parking problem due to the large number of neighbouring properties with no, or inadequate, off-street parking; also overflow parking from the school. Development of the adjacent brownfield site (Cooke Engineering) will increase traffic flows and exacerbate the parking problems.

'Highway safety 24. I therefore conclude, for the reasons outlined above, that satisfactory provision has not been made for access to the site, and as such the development would compromise highway safety. This is a matter which carries significant weight. Consequently the proposal would not be in accordance with Policy 57 of the Local Plan as set out above.

'The Planning Balance and Conclusion 29; ...However, the benefits of the scheme are significantly and demonstrably outweighed by the adverse impact of proposal in terms of its failure to provide a safe and suitable means of access for all people and its severe residual cumulative impact on highway safety.'