

Graham Lee
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Ashwell
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Our ref: NE/2013/117311/OR-02/IS1-L01

Date: 27 August 2020

Dear Graham,

Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan: Pre-Submission (Regulation 14).

Thank you for consulting the Environment Agency on the Ashwell draft Neighbourhood Plan. We aim to reduce flood risk, while protecting and enhancing the water environment.

Together with Natural England, English Heritage and Forestry Commission we have published joint advice on neighbourhood planning. This sets out sources of environmental information and ideas on incorporating the environment into plans. This is available at: <http://publications.environment-agency.gov.uk/PDF/GEHO0212BWAZ-E-E.pdf>.

Having reviewed your Plan we have identified that the neighbourhood plan area will be affected by the following environmental constraints:

Flood Zones

Your Plan includes areas which are located in Flood Zones 2 and 3. In accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) para 155-160, we remind you that the Sequential Test should be undertaken if the Plan is proposing development or promoting growth to ensure development is directed to the areas of lowest flood risk taking climate change into account. The application of the Sequential Test should be informed by the North Herts Local Planning Authority's Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA). It is important that your Plan also considers whether the flood risk issues associated with any proposed development can be safely managed to ensure development can come forward.

The Lead Local Flood Authority will be able to advise if there are areas at risk from surface water flood risk (including groundwater and sewerage flood risk) in your neighbourhood plan area. The Surface Water Management Plan will contain recommendations and actions about how such sites can reduce the risk of flooding.

We note and support the inclusion of Policy ASH5 (Flood Risk), which seeks to alleviate surface water flooding concerns. However, this policy does not make any reference to fluvial flood risk, and as such we advise this element be included alongside surface water flooding concerns for it be fully compliant with the NPPF.

Source Protection Zones/Aquifers

Your Plan includes areas which are located on aquifers and Source Protection Zones

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(SPZs). These should be considered within your Plan if growth or development is proposed here. The relevance of the designation and the potential implication upon development proposals should be seen with reference to our Groundwater Protection guidance: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/groundwater-protection>

Contaminated Land on Source Protection Zones/Aquifers

Your Plan area includes historical landfill located on aquifers and SPZs. If considering the redevelopment of this land, we recommend that developers:

- Follow the risk management framework provided in CLR11, Model Procedures for the Management of Land Contamination, when dealing with land affected by contamination;
- Refer to the Environment Agency Guiding Principles for Land Contamination for the type of information that we require in order to assess risks to controlled waters from the site. The Local Authority can advise on risk to other receptors, such as human health;
- Refer to the Thames River Basin Management Plan;
- Refer to our website at www.gov.uk/environment-agency for more information.

Waste Water Infrastructure

If your Plan proposes development or promotes growth we recommend early consultation with Affinity Water to determine whether there is (or will be prior to occupation) sufficient infrastructure capacity existing for the connection, conveyance, treatment and disposal of quantity and quality of water associated with any proposed development within environmental limits of the receiving watercourse. This may impact on the housing figures and the phasing of development.

Please note that if there is not sufficient capacity in the infrastructure then we must be consulted again with alternative methods of disposal.

Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity

We are pleased to see the inclusion of Policy ASH11 (Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity), however we think that this policy could be taken one step further by stating that any development brought forward should seek to deliver net biodiversity gains using the most up to date biodiversity metric and to protect these gains in perpetuity.

This part of the River Rhee (Ashwell Springs), although not a main river, does constitute rare chalk stream habitat and a site of special scientific interest and so we would like to see the river corridor protected from degradation and enhanced wherever possible. This could include providing a buffer zone along the rivers edge precluding opportunities for development. It should also be noted that there are significant areas of Flood Zone 2 and 3 within and around this part of the river, and so any opportunities to naturalise and protect it will also act in aiding the river's natural processes and countering the risk of flooding to surrounding inhabitants.

General Opportunities

Drawing up a neighbourhood plan is an opportunity to think about improving a local environment. General opportunities for neighbourhood planning include:

- New green spaces or improvements to public space through new development. This could include linking open spaces to make green corridors for people and wildlife, planting trees, or making improvements water quality and to local waterways.
- Recognising the value of certain environmental features within a plan to help bring

forward environmental projects without development to help secure wider funding.

- Helping a community to manage the risk of flooding by providing landscaping to manage and store water, and by promoting the use of sustainable drainage systems (SuDS).
- It could also help to encourage energy and water efficiency measures for new builds. These measures will reduce the cost of construction for developers and help to reduce utility bills for those using the building. This will also help addressing the issue of unsustainable water consumption.

We encourage you to seek ways in which your neighbourhood plan can improve the local environment. For your information, together with Natural England, English Heritage and Forestry Commission we have published joint guidance on neighbourhood planning, which sets out sources of environmental information and ideas on incorporating the environment into plans. This is available at:

<https://neighbourhoodplanning.org/toolkits-and-guidance/consider-environment-neighbourhood-plans/>

Should you have any queries regarding this response, please contact me.

Yours sincerely,

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