

Ashwell Village Design Statement



A description of the village character
and guidelines for future development

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The North Hertfordshire District Council considers that parts of the Design Statement are outside its area of responsibility.

Therefore the parts of the Ashwell Village Design Statement that have been adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance are presented in blue type and the appropriate Local Plan policies are indicated.

Those parts of the Design Statement which have not been adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance are presented in blue italic type.

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We hope that people will make use of it to produce their own design statements.

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1 Introduction

For its residents, Ashwell is much more than a collection of buildings. It is the sum of all the buildings, spaces, streets and trees, it is where they live and work - it is the material heart of the community.

The Ashwell Village Design Statement records the distinctive features that contribute to the character and quality of life in Ashwell.

The Design Statement also contains guidelines designed to ensure that changes to the village are sympathetic to that character and will help to maintain Ashwell as a diverse and thriving rural community.

The Village Design Group has written the Design Statement in consultation with the whole village. The background information used to develop the Statement came from a village character workshop held in February 1998. The Group then developed the information with particular reference to three themes: sustainability, mixed use and good design. A consultation draft of the Statement was circulated to all households and businesses in the Parish in January 1999. This consultation was complemented by a public meeting in February 1999, after which a further draft was produced. The Statement was then accepted by Ashwell Parish Council. Following further consultation with North Hertfordshire District Council a final draft was produced and the Design Statement was adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance on 31 October 2000.

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The Design Statement will be subject to periodic review, particularly when the North Hertfordshire District Local Plan No 3 is adopted.

What is the Statement for?

It will help to manage change, whether that change is a major new development or cumulative, small-scale additions and alterations.

It will help to ensure that development is in harmony with its setting. It will contribute to the conservation and, where possible, the enhancement of the local environment.

It will not be used to determine whether development should take place; that is a job for the Local Plan produced by the District Council. It will be used to help determine how planned development should be carried out and is, therefore, complementary to the local plan.

Who is the Statement for?

Residents - providing guidance for keeping alterations and extensions in sympathy with the character of the village.

Developers, their architects and designers - in order to explain what the village community expects to see in new and altered buildings.

The local planning authority - as Supplementary Planning Guidance to the North Hertfordshire District Local Plan.

How is the Statement to be used?

Each of the main sections consists of two parts:

- 1 A description of the existing character of the village and identification of the key features.
- 2 A set of guidelines to be used by those wishing to build, modify or extend property in the Parish of Ashwell.

The Statement should be used to help produce designs for new development, regardless of scale. It is meant to encourage and stimulate the following design process:

- A comprehensive survey of the relationship between the proposed development site, its surroundings and the village character in general.
- The identification of design opportunities presented by existing views, landscaping, built form and details.
- The demonstration, in graphic form, that this design process has been observed.

The Statement does not aim to provide design solutions but to identify some of the key characteristics that should be considered. Innovative design and the use of modern materials and techniques will be encouraged where they complement the existing character of the village.

What area does the Statement cover?

The whole of the Parish of Ashwell; the Statement covers the area surrounding the village as well as the village itself.

2 Ashwell and its History

The village of Ashwell lies at the centre of a large parish, extending to over 4,000 acres. The parish is the most northerly in Hertfordshire and borders both Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire. The early settlement developed to the north-west of a shallow chalk escarpment near springs surrounded by ash trees from which the village derives its name.



Ashwell Springs

The Iron Age hillfort at Arbury Banks provides evidence of settlement in the area as long ago as the seventh or eighth century BC. Ashwell itself probably dates from the early tenth century when the framework of the present road structure was determined. The village is mentioned in the Domesday Book in 1086, when it was one of the most important settlements in Hertfordshire.



The Parish Church of St Mary

A number of buildings in the village date from the medieval period, including Bear House, Dixies Farm House and Westbury Farm House. The Parish

Church of St Mary was built during the fourteenth century, although there were some later additions, including the 'Hertfordshire Spike' on top of the tower. The first brick house in the village was the Merchant Taylors' School in Mill Street, which was built in 1681.

Some barns were also built at this time. Little else was built until the nineteenth century, when improved transport made cheaper building materials available. This expansion slowed in the last decade of the nineteenth century when the population of the village declined.



The Merchant Taylors' Centre

From the 1920s until the 1970s most of the new houses - in Station Road, Dixies Close and Ashwell Street - were built by the local authority.

Since then new developments have taken place in Woodforde Close, Angell's Meadow, The Rickyard, Fordham's Close, Bacon's Yard and most recently at Westbury. Although these developments have added significantly to the number of houses in the village, the population has risen more slowly as the average household size has decreased.

Ashwell today is a thriving community of nearly 1,700 people and has the feel of a small market town. A school, various medical facilities and a wide range of businesses, shops and services are all available locally. There are also many voluntary groups and societies within the Parish.

3 Landscape and Wildlife

Over the centuries, agricultural activity has shaped the landscape around Ashwell. Almost all the woodland on the lighter land south of the village was cleared in Neolithic times, creating a landscape of large open fields with few hedges. The heavier clay land to the north remained as damp pasture and was not drained for crop production until after the enclosures of 1863.

At Ashwell End there is a series of smaller fields, bounded by hedges on all sides, remaining from medieval times. During the last decade, some of these fields have been converted to pasture for horses with resulting benefits to wildlife.

Despite the loss of the English elms which once shaded all the lanes on the north side of the village, the overall impression of Ashwell is of a village of trees, especially



Ashwell: a village of trees

Today the village is surrounded by land intensively farmed for arable crops, although some pasture remains for dairy cattle and horses. Most of the existing hedges are trimmed each year with only a few left uncut to provide food and shelter for wildlife. Within the last few years, two or three of the local farmers have begun a programme of hedge coppicing and planting.



Ashwell Quarry Nature Reserve

There are a number of rights of way which help to provide public access to the countryside.

when viewed from higher ground. This impression is accentuated by the general lack of large trees and woodland in the surrounding countryside. Within the village, however, mature trees can be found within the churchyards of both the parish church and the United Reformed Church, at West End and around the Springs. These are mostly ornamental plantings dating from the nineteenth century.

Elsewhere, the predominant large tree is ash with hawthorn, buckthorn, blackthorn and cherry plum forming the main hedge species. There is also some field maple and hazel on the heavier land. A number of horse chestnut trees has been planted to replace the elms.

Ashwell Springs, home to several rare species of flatworm, has been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Ashwell Quarry, a nature reserve managed by the county wildlife trust has a large colony of Pyramidal Orchids as well as many other chalk grassland plants. Dixies Meadow, formerly an orchard, is the site of a rare plant, the Drooping Star of Bethlehem, which has been found there for at least 150 years.

Landscape Guidelines

The landscape is the concern of the whole community. When changes are proposed it should be recognised and respected that:

To the south and west of the village

- 3.a The distinctive open character of the landscape should be retained.

The planting of rectilinear shelterbelts or new hedges dividing fields will be discouraged.

Policy 13

- 3.b Existing hedgerows should be managed in a way that is sympathetic to wildlife wherever possible.

Hedge heights and widths should be increased and hedges should be trimmed every other year at the end of the winter, rather than annually.

Policy 13 (ii)



Grass tracks should be kept in good condition

- 3.c *Grass tracks which are rights of way should be maintained in good condition for public access.*

Policy 13 (vi)

- 3.d The Arbury Banks ancient monument should be protected from further damage. *The use of stock fence rather than chain link would improve the character of the site. Annual rough cutting of the lynchet banks nearby would help to prevent further overgrowth of scrub, thus helping to restore locally native wild flowers.* Policies 13 (iii), 15



New planting filling gaps in a hedge

To the north of the village

- 3.e *Existing hedges should be retained and landowners encouraged to plant new ones, especially where this would fill gaps and create links with other wildlife habitats.* Policy 13 (i)

- 3.f The planting of new woodlands will be encouraged. It is hoped that this might include community woodland which can be enjoyed by local people. Policy 13 (i)

- 3.g All bodies of water must be protected. This is particularly important for the River Rhee and its associated springs and tributaries. A planting programme should be initiated in line with the Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan. Policy 13 (ii)

- 3.h Moated sites, ancient monuments and other sites of historical significance should be protected. Policies 13 (iii), 15

In the village itself

- 3.i Existing trees should be maintained and replaced as necessary over time. New developments should be seen as opportunities to increase the stock of trees within the village. Policy 20 (iii)

Wildlife Guidelines

The needs of wildlife are the concern of the whole community. When changes are proposed it should be recognised and respected that:

3.j Landowners, householders and developers can help to conserve existing wildlife habitats in a number of ways. These include planting hedges and copses to the north of the village, digging ditches and ponds, and creating areas of rough grassland. *Policies 13(i) & (ii), 14*

3.k Green corridors, which encourage the movement of wildlife, should be protected. Opportunities should be taken wherever possible to improve them and provide new ones. *Policy 14*



Green corridors help wildlife

3.l The Ashwell Springs basin must be carefully maintained, not only for its importance as a Site of Special Scientific Interest but also as a much valued local amenity. *Policy 14*



Ashwell Springs: Site of Special Scientific Interest

3.m The management of Ashwell Quarry and Ashwell Quarry Springs Nature Reserves by the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust will be supported and encouraged. *Policy 14*



Pyramid orchids at Ashwell Quarry

3.n Planting of new hedges, trees and woodlands should be with locally native species wherever possible. Suitable species include ash, cherry plum, blackthorn, buckthorn and hawthorn. *Policy 13 (i)*

3.o *Mowing regimes designed to conserve wild flowers should be introduced for road verges and banks, especially on the more chalky soils over Newnham Hill and along Bygrave Road, Hinxworth Road and Slip End Road. Garden plants should not be introduced.*

Policy 13(ii)

3.p *Landowners should be encouraged to consider ways of reducing their use of agrochemicals, including nitrogen fertiliser.*

3.q All those involved with the care of Ashwell's landscape and its wildlife should be aware of its special importance for the birds of open fields such as Lapwing, Golden Plover, Grey Partridge, Skylark, Corn Bunting, Kestrel, Little Owl and Yellowhammer. *Policies 13 & 14*

4 Community

Ashwell is a thriving community, both for its residents and for local businesses and services. The variety of businesses and shops available within the village leads to a level of daytime activity that is unusual in a community of this size. The churches, the school, the village hall, the pubs, the shops, the post office and the education centre all act as focal points for community activity. The village also supports many voluntary groups and societies and a wide range of social, leisure, educational and sporting activities. Many of the shops, services and other facilities are used by people from nearby villages as well as the residents of Ashwell.

The population of Ashwell is very diverse. There is a range of people of all ages, backgrounds and occupations, as well as a significant number of children and older people. This diversity contributes greatly to the vitality of the community.

The number of people living in Ashwell rose by about 23 per cent in the twenty years from 1971 to 1991 and has continued to rise gradually since then.



The United Reformed Church

Community Guidelines

It is important that community facilities are retained and increased in order to maintain vitality and to provide for the changing needs of residents of all ages and abilities. The provision of additional facilities within the village would reduce the need for people to travel outside the village.

Those seeking to provide new development or to make changes to existing buildings should recognise and respect that:

4.a The provision and use of social, recreational, cultural, educational and sports facilities within the village will be encouraged.

Policy 39

4.b New development should take into account the needs of villagers of all ages and abilities. Accessibility should also be taken into account when modifying existing buildings.

Policies 52, 57 (G2)

4.c New development should aid and promote good neighbourliness with open, shared, safe spaces of all sizes, communicating paths and a degree of privacy.

Policy 57 (G2, G3, G8)

4.d New development should provide a variety of housing types and sizes to suit people with a range of different needs, and to help enhance the social mix of the village.

Policy 57 (G4)

4.e The provision of services and utilities should anticipate the needs of an increasing population.

Policies 51, 57 G12

5 Business

The early prosperity of Ashwell came from farming, mainly growing barley for malting. In the mid-nineteenth century two breweries, now closed, were started in the village. This period also saw the rise and fall of strawplaiting, and of coprolite digging for the fertiliser industry.

Agriculture now provides less employment than previously but is still important locally. Changes in agricultural practices have meant that some farm buildings have been converted to business premises or housing, while some farmland is used as a caravan park.



Agriculture is still important to the local economy

In the last 30 years the increased use of cars has meant that people can travel further afield for work and can also visit shops elsewhere.

As a result, a number of shops in the village have closed and some traditional industries have disappeared.



Ashwell Post Office

Unlike many other villages in the area, a high proportion of the working population still works in the village, whilst half work in nearby towns. A small but rising number of people commute to London. Over a fifth of the population of Ashwell is retired, considerably more than the national average.

Records show that the village has always had a spread of occupations which would normally be associated with a small town rather than a village. Ashwell today is still remarkable for the number of shops, trades, businesses and services it supports.

Business Guidelines

It is important to strengthen Ashwell as a working village, offering a variety of services and employment. New small-scale enterprises will therefore be welcomed.

When such proposals are being planned, it should be recognised and respected that:

- 5.a Retail and service outlets in the village will be encouraged in order to give people a measure of independence and to reduce car use.

Policies 36(ii)

- 5.b A mix of residential and small-scale retail, commercial and office premises should be encouraged and developed where possible.

Policies 36 & 57 (G2)

- 5.c Priority will be given to proposals for small commercial and industrial concerns requiring 'B1' planning permission. (These are activities which can take place in a residential area.)

Policy 37

- 5.d Conversion of commercial premises to residential use will not normally be supported.

Policies 36 & 57 (G2)

6 Settlement Pattern

Ashwell is a relatively long, narrow village built either side of a main street running roughly south-west to north-east. The current settlement pattern reflects Ashwell's history. In the Middle Ages Ashwell was an important market town and the buildings in the centre of the village are densely packed and fronting the main road.



Many older houses front directly onto the street

Until recently Ashwell was largely a farming community with a number of farms based in the centre of the village. The farm houses had yards to the side and rear, with outbuildings running along the boundaries behind. Labourers lived in cottages, which were usually terraced, either directly fronting the main road or in Back Street and Silver Street. The village has expanded substantially in the twentieth century. Individual houses have formed ribbon developments along Green Lane and Newnham Hill.



A maltings converted into flats

The local authority has built houses in Station Road and Dixies Close and there have been many residential developments on the agricultural land within the village. The two maltings have also been converted to residential use.



Newer houses are often set back from the road

The density of building in the village core is high and has become higher as old buildings have been extended and open spaces have been filled in. Houses in the centre mostly front directly onto the street and this adds to the feeling of closeness. Away from the centre, houses are generally set back from the street and are less densely packed. There is also a tendency for the height of buildings to decrease away from the village core.



Agricultural buildings converted to residential use

Most buildings in the village are of two storeys, although there are some of three storeys in the centre. There are some single storey and dormer bungalows in Lucas Lane and on the roads leading out of the village. Only the two former maltings, now converted to residential use, exceed three storeys in height.

Recent developments have been of larger, more expensive houses and this has led to a comparative lack of affordable housing.

Settlement Pattern Guidelines

Different parts of Ashwell exhibit distinctively different characteristics.

New development, and improvements or extensions to existing buildings, should take these differences into account and should recognise and respect that:

Overall

- 6.a The scale of the proposal should be in keeping with existing buildings in the area.
- 6.b There should be a good balance between buildings and open or green spaces, including gardens, in the area.
- 6.c The general building density of the area of the village should be taken into account.
- 6.d The development should respect the characteristics of the area of the village where it is taking place.

For street pattern

- 6.e New streets should reflect the characteristics of the existing street pattern: basically rectilinear although with few streets which are rigidly straight.
- 6.f New developments should be integrated with the village and form part of a linked pattern.



New streets should reflect the existing street pattern

- 6.g Ribbon development is difficult to integrate with the rest of the village and should be avoided.
- 6.h Major cul-de-sacs should be avoided, but small courtyard developments or closes of terraced houses can be acceptable. Separate pedestrian access should be provided for such developments wherever possible.

- 6.i Building density should decrease away from the centre of the village.

For building form

- 6.j Storey height should be varied to reflect the historic building form of the particular part of the village.
- 6.k Uniformity of design in smaller developments can be acceptable if it reflects a particular feature of the village, such as terraced houses.



Terraced houses fronting directly on the road

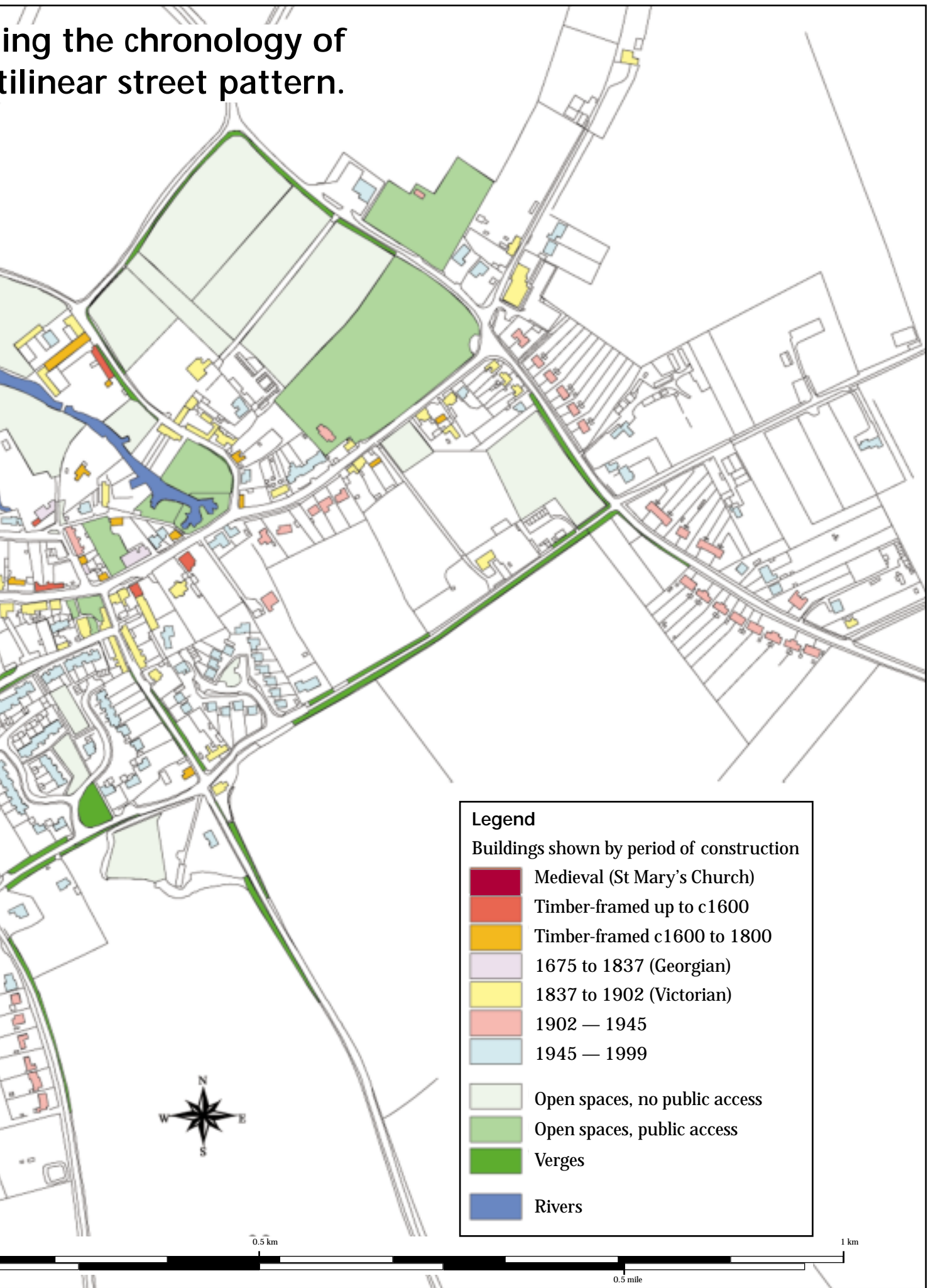
- 6.l Houses that front directly on to the road or pavement are a significant feature of the village. This should be encouraged where appropriate.
- 6.m Where possible all new development should include affordable houses, in a proportion to meet local needs. *Policy 29(a)*
- 6.n New housing development should be small-scale, unless it meets a specific, identified local need. *Policy 29*
Note: Small scale means not normally more than six units.
- 6.o New development should be discreetly sited and should not intrude upon the landscape.

All these guidelines are in line with Policy 57 (G1 & G2), except where shown.

Ashwell Village shows development and rect



ing the chronology of
tilinear street pattern.



7 Buildings

Ashwell is an attractive village with a rich variety of building styles and materials. No single style predominates. The old and the new generally intermingle harmoniously. The variety of shapes and styles in the High Street represents the way the village has developed over time. The buildings are diverse but are comfortable together. There is a total of 75 listed buildings in the village, mostly in the medieval core.



One of 75 listed buildings in Ashwell

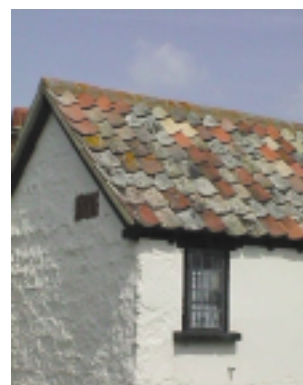
Walls

There are some good examples of authentic exposed timber framing and other, less convincing, examples of applied timber framing. There is some red brick in the village and a number of nineteenth century houses were built of Arlesey or Cambridgeshire white bricks. In the twentieth century a wide variety of brick types has been used as availability and fashions have changed. Some buildings have decorative brickwork below the eaves, or above windows and doorways. Others have decorative details in contrasting colours.

Many walls are rendered and painted and there is some pebbledash. There are a few examples of pargetting and other decorative renderings. Pale colours predominate, including white, cream, beige and pink. There is also some dark-stained weatherboarding. Reclaimed materials have been used successfully in a number of recently built houses.



Some typical Ashwell roofs



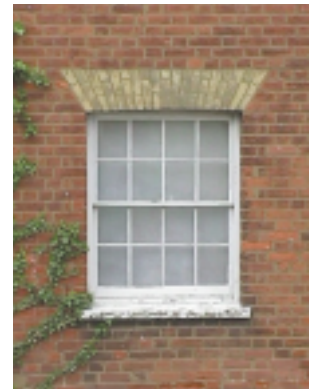
Roofs

Roofs are generally finished with either plain clay tiles or natural slates in the historic core of the village. Interlocking tiles have been used on many post-war developments. Some thatching remains. There is a



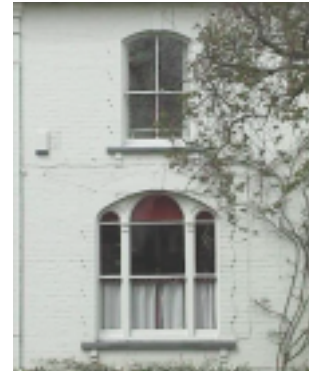
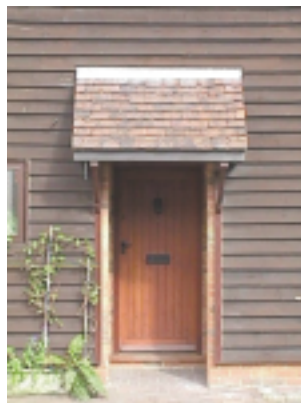
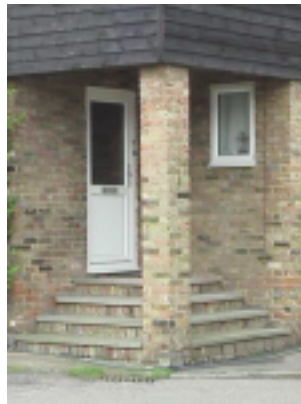
Decorative bargeboards are a feature of the village

variety of gables, the pitch varying with the roofing material. There are some hipped roofs but few half hips. Gables with scalloped bargeboards are a feature of the village, particularly at the western end. There are many dormer windows throughout the village.



Doors and porches

Domestic buildings generally have doors and porches typical of the period in which they were built. Doors are generally plain, some are partly glazed and others have fanlights over them. Porches, where present, are usually small and simple. Canopies over doors, rather than full porches, are also a feature. There is a large range of doors and porches on modern houses, some of them based on traditional forms. Some older properties have had doors made from modern materials fitted to them, with varying degrees of success.



Windows

Both vertical sash and casement windows are in evidence. Windows are generally small-paned in wood frames. Panes are usually taller than they are wide. Most window frames are painted but, in a few older buildings and many new ones, stain finishes are also seen. Plastic framed sealed unit windows are found in many new buildings and as replacements in some older buildings.



Chimneys

Ornamental chimneys are a feature of some older houses. Chimneys on modern houses, where present, tend to be more utilitarian.

Building Guidelines

Style

The overall quality of a building and its design is more important than the style adopted. Therefore it should be recognised and respected that:

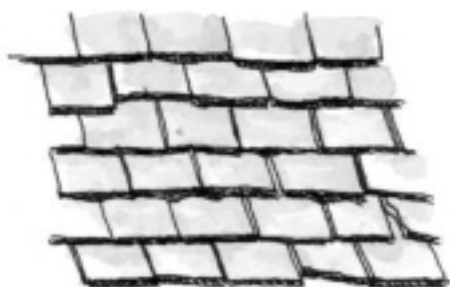
- 7.a Design should be functional and practical. Where possible, construction methods should be simple and appropriate for the building's use.
- 7.b Architectural detail should be restrained. Copying features of older buildings can enhance a new design but slavish or exaggerated imitation of older features can give rise to a building which is little more than pastiche.
- 7.c Good modern design will be encouraged but it is important that new buildings and extensions harmonise with their surroundings.

Size and proportion

The overall proportion of a development will be an important factor in determining its suitability. Therefore it should be recognised and respected that:

- 7.d New buildings should not dominate neighbouring buildings and should respect the existing skyline.

Construction materials



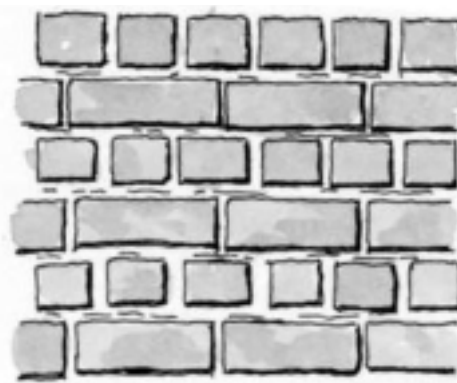
The use of reclaimed materials can be beneficial

- 7.e Materials of construction should be selected from those in common use in the village. The use of reclaimed materials can help to soften the effect of newly constructed buildings.

Walls

Suitable materials include:

- 7.f Rendered finish or pebble dash in pale colours.
- 7.g Brick: pale mixtures, second-hand stocks, hand cut or of rustic nature. Where used, red brick should be confined to detail courses. A pale painted finish is acceptable. Wire-cut and engineering bricks should be avoided.



English bond brickwork

- 7.h Dark-stained feather edged boarding. This is not a traditional construction material for domestic buildings, but it has been used successfully in conversions and some new houses and may be used to add variety and 'soften' developments.

Roofs

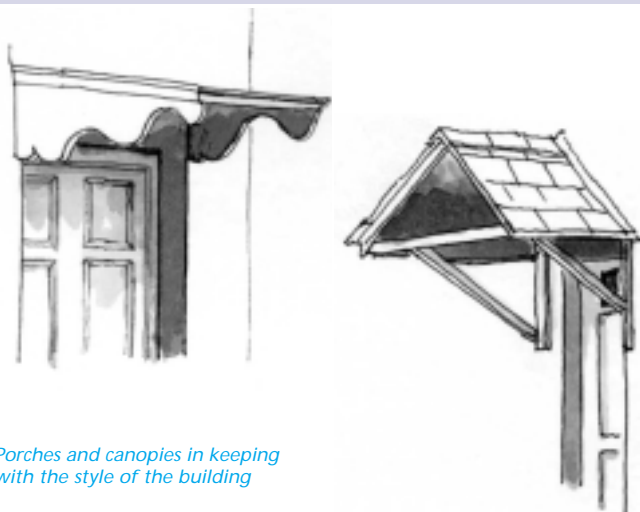
Roof construction should respect the historic forms common in the village. These are generally:

- 7.i Brown Mixture plain clay tiles or thatch on steeper pitched roofs.
- 7.j Grey slate, yellow or red mixture pantiles on low pitched roofs.
- 7.k Thatched roofs should be retained and, where necessary, repaired. Long straw is the preferred material for new thatching.

Designers of new buildings should also recognise that:

- 7.l Most houses in the village have plain gable ends.
- 7.m Decorative bargeboards are a feature of a number of buildings.
- 7.n Where used, dormers are generally above the gutter line and pitched, with the pitch reflecting the pitch of the main roof.
- 7.o Flat roofs are not appropriate.

Doors & porches



Porches and canopies in keeping with the style of the building

Porches and canopies should be in keeping with the style and construction of the building and the overall building line. In addition, designers of new property and those improving existing buildings should recognise and respect that:

- 7.p Doors are traditionally panelled, sometimes including glazing.
- 7.q Framed, ledged and braced doors are common on older vernacular buildings, but are also found on modern developments.
- 7.r Mass-produced doors are often not appropriate, particularly when used to 'improve' older properties. For example, fanlights should be part of the door frame and not included in the door itself.
- 7.s *The size, style of, and the materials used for replacement doors and windows should match those in the original building.*

Windows

Windows are the eyes of the building and window detailing, particularly proportion, is critical to the overall design and appearance.

New designs and alterations should take into account that:

- 7.t Windows should be generally small-paned, with both the overall window and individual panes taller than they are wide. Hence, pairs or triptychs of small casements should be used rather than large, single pane windows.
- 7.u On new buildings, the frame material is of less importance than the style of window, although timber windows are preferred in the historic parts of the village. Where frames are plastic, the frame and glazing bars should not be too thick. False glazing bars should not be used but, where they are essential, applied or bonded bars are preferable to glazing bars sandwiched in sealed units. Aluminium windows should be painted.
- 7.v In older buildings, the traditional style and materials of the windows should be retained wherever possible. UPVC windows are not appropriate unless they fully match the colour, form and proportion of the originals.

Chimneys

- 7.w The use of chimneys will be encouraged where appropriate. They should reflect the character of neighbouring properties.

Garages and parking

- 7.x Car parking should not predominate. Garages should not overshadow houses.
- 7.y Garages must not be converted to living accommodation unless there is sufficient off-road parking. *Policy 57 G11*
- 7.z *New building should have adequate storage space to prevent misuse of garage space. The building of cellars will be encouraged wherever possible.*

Policy 57 G11

All these guidelines are in line with Policies 1, 7, 18, 28, except where shown.

8 Open and Connecting Spaces

Open spaces contribute greatly to the visual character of Ashwell. The most well known of these is the Springs, which is valued by local people and visitors alike. The recreation ground provides a safe play area for children, as well as football and cricket pitches. The village garden in Swan Street offers a quiet area with seating.



The village garden in Swan Street

Much of the open space, however, is privately owned and public areas are limited, particularly at the western end of the village. Some open areas within the village provide vistas looking out to the surrounding area, providing a strong visual connection with the countryside. There are also points around the edge of the village which provide views into the centre.



The children's playground



The 'twitchell' at West End

The village is served by a network of footways (the 'twitchells'). These form well-used linking routes for pedestrians, particularly between the southern part of the village and the centre. Use of the footways reduces vehicular traffic within the village. They also perform an important social function by providing informal meeting places. Outside the village, the network of footpaths, bridleways and 'green lanes' is well used. The few circular walks are greatly appreciated.



Ashwell Street: a 'green lane'

A variety of hedges, fences and walls is found. There is no dominant boundary material or type. A few boundaries are left open.

Open and Connecting Spaces Guidelines

Open spaces are an essential part of the village fabric and provide important visual links throughout the village and to the open countryside beyond. All developments should recognise and respect that:

8.a The open spaces in the centre of the village should be preserved to relieve the dense nature of that area of the village and to retain their rural character and value for wildlife. *Policies 7 & 57 (G8)*

8.b Important vistas must be protected, particularly those which allow views of the countryside from within the village. Where possible, new vistas should be created. *Policy 57 (G1)*



Important vistas must be protected

8.c There is a need for more public open space, particularly at the western end of the village. Schemes to address this problem will be supported. *Policy 57 (G8)*

8.d Safe, off-road and informal children's play areas are needed throughout the village. New play areas should be both sympathetically sited and provided with play equipment compatible with the surroundings. *Policy 57 (G8)*

8.e Where appropriate, new development should provide adequate publicly accessible space both for children's play and local amenity. *Policy 57 (G8)*

Footways (including twitchells) footpaths and bridleways are an important recreational and social asset for the village. It should therefore be respected that:

8.f Wherever possible, additional twitchells should be provided for all new developments. *Policy 57 (G3)*

8.g *All footpaths should be kept open and in a condition appropriate to their rural setting.*

8.h Schemes to promote awareness and use of the Parish rights-of-way network will be supported. *Policy 57 (G3)*

8.i Schemes to provide additional public access, particularly circular routes and links to existing paths, will be encouraged. *Policy 52 & 57 (G3)*

Boundaries

It should be respected that:

8.j Boundary materials should be in keeping with the construction style of the immediate surroundings. *Policy 57 (G2 & G9)*

8.k Hedges should be retained and encouraged, especially away from the centre of the village. *Policy 57 (G2 & G9)*



A thatched cob wall

8.l Quick-growing conifers such as Leyland Cypress are inappropriate to the character of Ashwell. Native, broadleaf species are preferred. *Policy 57 (G9)*

9 Highways and traffic

Like all ancient villages, Ashwell was not built for the demands of modern traffic and this causes problems. In recent years there has been an increase both in the volume of traffic and in the number of parked vehicles in the village. Some drivers use Ashwell as a 'rat run' in order to avoid hold-ups in Baldock but there is also a large amount of local traffic. Goods vehicles with heavy axle weights can cause damage, particularly to older buildings.

Traffic-calming schemes have been introduced at the village entrances. They have had some effect on traffic speed but have been criticised for being unsightly.

There are some old trackways in the village, the most important of which is Ashwell Street. These are largely unmade and are lined with hedgerows.

Highways away from the centre of the village and also parts of Lucas Lane and Station Road are edged by grass banks.

Kerbing has traditionally been of varying sizes of granite blocks, although more recently concrete kerb-stones have been used. Dropped kerbs have been provided in places to assist those with limited mobility

and to allow easy passage of wheelchairs and pushchairs.

Public transport is essential to village life. There is a bus service through Ashwell to Baldock, Letchworth and Hitchin and also to the Mordens and Litlington. A taxibus operates between the village and the railway station during peak periods.



Village gateway

Highways and Traffic Guidelines

Traffic

Policies 9 & 57 (G3)

It should be acknowledged that the needs of the car are of less importance than the conservation of the character of the village.

Therefore it should be recognised and respected that:

- 9.a *The requirements of pedestrians and cyclists should have priority over those of motorised traffic.*
- 9.b *Where possible, priorities at junctions within the village should be changed, in order to reduce traffic speed.*
- 9.c Provision of sympathetic traffic calming measures will be supported in order to improve the safety of people and to protect vulnerable buildings.
- 9.d Priority will be given to measures that encourage walking and cycling.
- 9.e Dropped kerbs will be encouraged where possible to assist those with limited mobility.
- 9.f *The use of road markings should be minimised.*
- 9.g *Yellow lines should not be used.*
- 9.h *There should be weight and length restrictions for vehicles in the village, except for access.*
- 9.i The introduction of a 20 mph speed limit in the centre of the village will be supported.
- 9.j The provision of discreet off-street parking facilities will be encouraged.

Public transport

It should be recognised and respected that:

9.k *The current bus, train and taxi services should be retained and improved.*

9.l Bus shelters, where required, should be in a style appropriate to their village setting.

Policy 57 (G2)

Highways & byways

It should be recognised and respected that:

9.m Unmade trackways are an important part of the village character and should be retained.

Policy 57 (G3)

9.n *Roads should not be widened by 'creeping' as a result of resurfacing or repair work.* *Policy 13(ii)*

9.o *Roadside verges should be protected from encroachment on both sides.* *Policy 13(ii)*

9.p New kerbs should be of granite rather than moulded concrete. *Policy 57 (G1)*

9.q The use of flexible road surfaces should be maintained where possible. Modular surfaces should be avoided. *Policy 57 (G1)*

9.r New streets should reflect the rural nature of the village. *Policy 57 (G1)*

10 Street Furniture

Street lighting in the central part of the village is of a low intensity and is provided by downward facing lamps on green swan-neck poles. Some other parts of the village are more brightly lit by modern lamps.

There are many wooden telephone poles in the village and some metal ones. Other utilities are generally provided through underground conduits, although there are many conspicuous manhole covers, gas boxes and pipes. There is a traditional red telephone box next to the Rose and Crown. Post boxes are also traditional in style.



Typical road name sign

In the conservation area there are very few obvious aerials and no obvious satellite television dishes. They are more noticeable elsewhere in the village.



The traditional telephone and post boxes

The Parish Council has provided litter bins and dog waste bins in the village, as well as simple seats and benches throughout the Parish.

Direction signs are finger posts with black lettering on a white background. Street names are also displayed in black on white, on wooden boards supported by wooden posts. Shop signs are discreet and either painted on their fascias or small hanging signs.

Traditional street furniture contributes to the character of the village.

Street Furniture Guidelines

All street furniture should be of good quality and appropriate to its setting. Therefore the following should be recognised and respected:

Public utilities

- 10.a *Where practical, new cables should be routed underground.* Policies 20(v)
- 10.b *Existing overhead cables should be replaced with underground cables.* Policies 20(v)
- 10.c *Recessed manhole covers should be used so that their appearance can reflect surrounding road or pavement surfaces.* Policy 57 (G1)
- 10.d *Gas boxes, vents and meters should not be sited on front elevations.* Policy 57 (G2)

Aerials and satellite dishes

- 10.e These should be located in roof spaces where possible. When they must be mounted outside, care should be taken that they are not intrusive. Policy 48

Lighting

- 10.f The existing low intensity of lighting should be retained in order to avoid pollution of the night sky. Downlighting using white, not orange, light is preferred.
- 10.g *The existing swan-neck style of lamp-post should be retained. Over time, other types of lamp standard in the village should be replaced with the swan-neck type.*
- 10.h *Private security lights should be carefully sited to avoid causing a hazard for road users. They should not light up other houses or act as street lights.*

Bollards

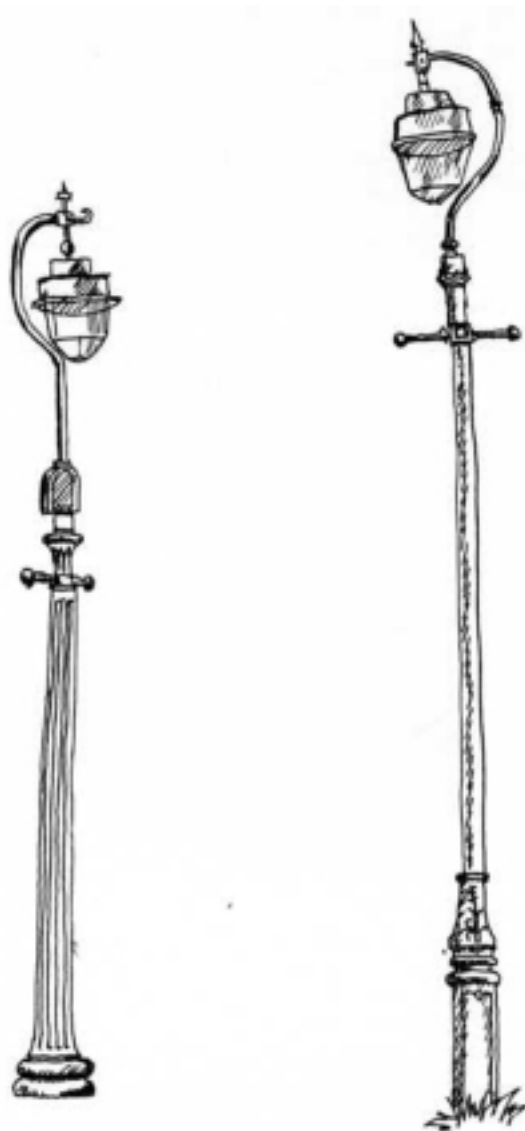
- 10.i Any new bollards should be in keeping with the style, design and material of those already installed. Policy 57 (G3)

Path Surfaces

- 10.j *Tarmac surfaces on pavements should be retained.* Policy 57 (G3)

Village Seats

- 10.k Any new seats in and around the village should match the existing ones in styles and materials.



The existing swan-neck style of lamp-post should be retained

11 Design Checklists

If you are considering any sort of building work in Ashwell, please take a few moments to look through the following checklists before formulating your plans. *(Please ✓ the boxes)*

Developers

Will what you are planning:

- ☐ Blend in with the landscape?
- ☐ Make allowance for local wildlife?
- ☐ Enhance the social mix?
- ☐ Strengthen Ashwell as a working community?
- ☐ Respect the traditional settlement pattern of the village?
- ☐ Blend in with the surroundings in terms of scale, density, character and building numbers?
- ☐ Provide additional open space?
- ☐ Provide new or preserve existing vistas into, out of or within the village?
- ☐ Encourage pedestrian access and link in with existing footways?
- ☐ Include high quality street furniture which is appropriate for its setting?

Architects and Designers of New Buildings

Please ask yourself the following questions about the building or extension which you are planning:

- ☐ Is its position and size in keeping with neighbouring buildings?
- ☐ Is the roof height and pitch appropriate for the area and the style of building?
- ☐ Are the construction materials in common use in Ashwell and is their colour appropriate?
- ☐ Are the type of windows to be used appropriate for the building and the area, and is their size and proportion in keeping with the historic norm?
- ☐ Are the parking arrangements sufficiently inconspicuous so that, for example, the garage does not dominate the frontage?
- ☐ Will there be sufficient storage to allow the garage to be used for its proper purpose and avoid on-street parking?
- ☐ Are you retaining all existing hedgerows and native trees?
- ☐ Will what you are proposing harmonise with existing buildings and make a positive contribution to the character of the area?

Householders

If you are considering altering the exterior of your property, or changing any external detail of the building, its paintwork, signs, garden or surrounds, please undertake your own design assessment by studying each elevation or aspect of the building and asking yourself the following:

List the distinctive features of the property.

- ☐ Are there any particular features which are out of character with the building itself or with neighbouring properties or with the Design Statement?
- ☐ Is what I am proposing in accord with the Design Statement?
- ☐ Does what I am proposing enhance distinctive features or help remove uncharacteristic ones?
- ☐ Will it make a positive contribution to the character of the area?

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Ashwell village nestles into the north face of chalk downs

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The Countryside Agency



Local Agenda 21



**CPRE
- The Hertfordshire Society**



North Hertfordshire District Council