

Standing up for Hertfordshire's countryside

Andrew Hunter
Planning and Building Control
North Hertfordshire District Council
Council Offices
Gernon Road
Letchworth Garden City
Herts SG6 3JF

Our Ref:

Your Ref:

22nd August 2018 (by email)

Dear Mr. Hunter,

Application No. 18/01874/FP

Erection of 9 (6 No. Three Bedroom, 3 No. Four Bedroom) dwellings with associated parking, amenity space and associated ancillary works, following demolition of existing redundant structures, creation of new access from Station Road on Land at the junction of Ashwell Street and Station Road, Ashwell, Hertfordshire.

CPRE Hertfordshire objects to this application for inappropriate residential development in the Rural Area Beyond The Green Belt and outside the current settlement boundary of Ashwell, contrary to Policies 6 (Rural Areas Beyond the Green Belt) and 7 (Selected Villages beyond the Green Belt) in the current North Herts Local Plan No.2. In 2017 the Supreme Court (in the case of Suffolk Coastal DC v Hopkins Homes Ltd. (2017 UKSC 37)) held that Local Plan policies to protect the countryside from development (such as Local Plan Policies relating to the Rural Area Beyond The Green Belt) are not policies for the supply of housing and therefore are not out of date and should be accorded full weight.

While the site is not designated as a potential development site in the Submission Local Plan, the Council has proposed to adjust the settlement boundary to remove the site from the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt. The Planning Statement accompanying the application has been entirely written as though the Submission Local Plan has been adopted. It has not. Moreover, the removal of this site from the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt was objected to at the Examination In Public and to approve development in advance of the Inspector's adjudication would be inappropriate.

The proposal is for development in the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt and does not comply with any of the criteria included in current Local Plan Policies 6 and 7. The latter states that development should be within the main area of the village as shown on the Proposals Map. This site is outside that area. It also states that should the proposed development be within a Conservation Area it should make a 'positive' enhancement to the character of the Conservation Area. In our view this proposal will not do that.

While there is development along the north side of Station Road there is an absence of residential development along this stretch of the road on the south side, until the junction with Ashwell Street. Accordingly, the erection of a group of dwellings on what is currently open pasture will adversely affect the character of this part of the village and impact on the conservation area.

At paragraph 6.4.0 of the Planning Statement the applicant states that “*The site appears to be a garden area, laid to grass.*” This is supposition. There is no evidence presented to substantiate this assumption. In fact, elsewhere in the Planning Statement it is recognised that “*the site is currently an enclosed green space used for grazing*” (para.5.1.1) and that “*there are some pig sheds on a small part of the site*” (para 5.1.2). These imply that the land use is historically agricultural.

Throughout the Planning Statement there are repeated instances of such speculative comments by the Applicant and omission of information which we would normally expect to see in an application for Full Permission. For example, at para. 7.6.4 they state that “*In respect of the Conservation Area and potential archaeological remains within the site, it is not considered that the harm that would result would be substantial. ... The public benefits of providing housing in a sustainable location which would have economic, social and environmental benefits are considered to outweigh any harm to the heritage assets.*” However, no evidence is presented to support that statement and no Heritage or Archaeological assessments appear to have been carried out. Similarly there are no biodiversity, ecology, flood risk, drainage impact, or waste management assessments presented either.

On Highway and access issues, again we get a bald statement at para. 8.1.1: “*No adverse impact on highway safety would result from the development.*” In fact, the proposed access on to Station Road is in very close proximity to that exiting from Philosopher’s Gate on the other side of the road. It will ultimately be for the Highway Authority to determine if this is within acceptable parameters, but in our view it is not.

The Applicant appears to consider that because the proposal, in their view, delivers some social, economic and environmental benefits it therefore constitutes a sustainable form of development. Despite going so far as to say “*The local school is close to capacity and there may be problems with patient registrations at the Ashwell surgery. If this is the case a scheme of 9 new dwellings might give rise to a degree of social harm.*” (para. 6.2.2). there is no attempt in the accompanying documentation to assess the likely impact of the development on local services such as the JMI school, health services etc or the ability of residents to access them.

We consider that this application contains insufficient information to make a balanced planning judgement. It does not comply with current Local Plan policies nor meet the sustainability criteria in the National Planning Policy Framework. As stated above, it would be inappropriate and premature to approve it as presented prior to the adoption of the emerging Local Plan. Consequently we urge the Council to refuse it.

Yours sincerely,



David Irving